Chapter 7. Cultural Traditions I: The Edge of Provincetown

The dunes form a fringe to Provincetown, where town ends and country begins, a raw, partially-tamed expanse of patchy dune-ridged valleys ending at the Backshore. For over two centuries, the traditions of Provincetown have spilled into this place. Historically, this included forestry, livestock grazing, deer hunts, cranberry farms, lifesaving, and salvage, among other pursuits. Many Provincetown residents never went to the Backshore, just as many never sailed to offshore fishing banks. But segments of Provincetown have always used the dunes and Backshore, uses that continued throughout the last and into the present century. During the twentieth century, some from Provincetown came to experience the dunes and the Backshore as something additional, a special place, a formative place for growth and creativity, a place on the town's fringe for pilgrimage, grounding, and release, a place of freedom for gaining personal sanity from the pressures of a small town, and for training its children. Like the surrounding ocean with its fishing banks, the dunes and its Backshore became an important fringe of land that helped to hold the center of Provincetown together.

"Old Provincetown"

The Provincetown town hall is an impressive building at the center of the community. It sits at the foot of the dune holding the Pilgrim Monument, the world's tallest granite tower, commemorating the first landing of the Pilgrims in the New World at this sandy spot. The entry into town hall presents dual wooden staircases that arc upward toward a grand hall where town meetings are convened, where the public governs itself. The stairways are framed by two large frescos by Ross Moffett (1888-1971). On the right, "Gathering Beach Plums," three women are gathering fruits. They work on the dunes above town. On the left, "Spreading the Nets," four men dry fishing nets beside the town with the blue harbor in the near distance. And finally, surrounding everything, wrapping around the walls of the room, are huge painted dunes. Like white arms they embrace the entry room, cradling the town and townspeople. This is "Old Provincetown," as seen by Ross Moffett. The depiction of this traditional way of life is the town's foremost public image. Each person must move through it to get into the building. A person conducting town business must stroll through Old Provincetown.

Passing between the frescos, one enters a hall branching off into government offices noticed with plaques – Town Accountant, Town Clerk, Treasurer, Tax Collector, and Town Mayor. This high-ceiling hall is filled with huge oil paintings by prominent Provincetown artists. Art is also Provincetown. In this hall it surrounds you. The subjects are as noteworthy as the artists: Charles W. Hawthorne (1872-1930), "Fish Cleaners" and "Crew of the *Philomena Marta*"; William F. Hallsall (1841-1919), "The Peaked Hills of Cape Cod"; Henry Hensche (1901-1992), "His Breakfast" (a portrait); William L'Engle (1928), "Marya"; S. Edmund Oppenheim (1955), "Portrait of Harry Kemp"; and Salvatore Del Deo (1988), "Captain Francis 'Flyer' Santos". Like the foyer's frescos, these prominently-displayed oils are windows to the town's past and current self-identity: Provincetown means Art.

The images establish and reinforce the town's civic identity. The art at town hall evokes central ideas: proud mariners, the Portuguese, old Yankees, the commercial cod fishermen, boat captains and crews, the salteries and fish cleaners; America's premier art colony with the schools of Hawthorne, Hensche, and their accomplished students; and local eccentrics like Harry Kemp, the "poet of the dunes." The town's social mix is evident: Harry Kemp, a bohemian who lived in

a dune shack until winter drove him to a shelter in town, is honored alongside Captain Francis 'Flyer' Santos, a Portuguese boat captain.

Sand dunes and dune activities are prominent among the icons on display at town hall. They are central parts of the civic identity. Beach plums are gathered on their slopes. The "Peaked Hills" in Hallsall's painting are shown from the sea as a mariner would see them, set high on the dune horizon, a signal for fishing boats and ships in commerce, a warning of the treacherous bars just offshore. Many dune shack residents are linked to the images displayed. Hazel Hawthorne Werner, the niece of Charles W. Hawthorne, owned two shacks. Josephine Del Deo, writer and shack activist, and her husband, artist and restaurateur Salvatore Del Deo, who counted Harry Kemp as his "spiritual godfather," have used shacks for a half-century.

There's little wonder then about civic outpourings of support for the dune shacks. The dunes and their traditional uses are part of the town's civic image. During the late twentieth century, while segments of town pushed for real estate development, the town's majority has consistently rallied to protect the dunes and the dune shacks. Like the Pilgrims commemorated by the granite tower, the dune shacks and their uses have become entrenched icons within the civic identity. Threats to the shacks represent threats to the town. They are perceived as threats to the core of the town, Old Provincetown with its cherished traditions.

When I refer to "Old Provincetown" in this chapter, I mean that iconic community featured in the frescos and oils at town hall. It's a concept of a society of mariners, beach plum gatherers, and their families with Portuguese and Yankee roots, of prominent artists from America and Europe, and of maverick thinkers and writers. Old Provincetown is that iconic community embedded so deeply within the core civic identity. Today, socially, the concept of Old Provincetown is primarily held by the year-round residents of the lower cape who consider Provincetown their home and who have inherited or adopted as their own the community's historic Yankee and Portuguese heritage. Many of them now live in neighboring towns like Truro and Orleans. The edges of Provincetown have become less distinct as family members have been pushed to neighboring towns by high rents and property taxes. But for many displaced kin, as for the year-round resident families, Provincetown has remained the cultural center, the true home. The importance of the dunes in maintaining the concept of Old Provincetown as part of the living traditions for its core of residents is the subject of this chapter.

The following materials show the deep connections of year-round residents in Provincetown to the Backshore, illustrated with a detailed case example from four women. The women are dune shack users who have never owned a shack, but have used them as friends of shack heads. While unique in the details of their lives and experiences, the women in the case represent a larger class of users from year-round resident families with long roots in Provincetown, families that identify with the heritage of Old Provincetown. Of the people I interviewed, this included the Malicoats, the Tashas, the Del Deos, and the Fitts-Walkers. Undoubtedly there are many more I did not interview. The stories the women tell wend among several themes, but their paths lead back to a central issue, the preservation of a way of life identified with Old Provincetown. The preservation issue is expressed in seemingly scattered particulars, like lighthouses, beach plums, banners of Portuguese fishing boats, heritage museums, reasonable rents, and of course, dune shacks. Yet the women conflate them, conceptually, into their core issue, their yearning hope of preserving a traditional way of life, a valued heritage in Provincetown. In their tales, I came to understand that the struggle to preserve the traditional uses of the dune shacks becomes emblematic of the struggle to save the whole and all its cherished parts. In this way, the dune shacks and their uses become powerful images of a larger struggle for the people of Provincetown, one of cultural survival as a distinctive community on the lower cape.

Four Women from Provincetown

For four women, Provincetown has been a cultural center for more than a lifetime. I met them at Snail Road on a Sunday morning, where the main trail begins its climb into the dunes from the East End of Provincetown. Snail Road was once a road for wagons and motor vehicles over the dunes to the Peaked Hill Coast Guard Station. It's a footpath now. The trail cascades off a tall dune forming a sandy white causeway spilling steeply into a dark patch of wood, burying large oaks at its foot. The four women arranged to meet me here. They wanted to tell me about the importance of the dune shacks to the cultural traditions of their people. They wanted to tell me their stories while walking into the dunes, following trails they have used since young children, heading toward an important destination in their lives, the Tasha shack. This was the best way to tell their stories, they said.

Kathie Joseph Meads and Maureen Joseph Hurst are sisters. Susan Leonard is their close friend from childhood. These three descend from old Cape Cod families. Theo Cozzi Poulin, another friend from childhood, was born at Provincetown from an immigrant Italian family drawn by the art colony. For the four women, the traditions of Provincetown were personal, living traditions. They believed these traditions were under tremendous strain from outside forces. And they believed their traditions were bound to the dunes and the dune shacks. The telling of this story was begun by Kathie Joseph Meads, on our foray among the dunes:

Kathie: It really is such a strong feeling. I don't know if other people feel the way we feel about where they grew up. We were talking this morning about it – the uniqueness of growing up in Provincetown, and the importance of things like the dune shacks and walking across the breakwater and all these things that we did, going clamming, getting mussels, getting berries, all this stuff. We really didn't go out of town. It was like an island. Our parents didn't have cars and stuff. So this was our whole life, three-miles-long and two-miles-wide, this was our whole life. There were no vacations. People didn't take vacations. We lived off the land here, and the water. We ate fish five days a week

Susan: We ate a lot of fish. We ate a lot of fish. *[Laughter.]*

Maureen: Picked a lot of blueberries.

Kathie: Lobster again? *[Laughter.]* You're kidding me, we're having scallops again?

Susan: Can you imagine? Too much lobster? We ate like the Rockefellers. We absolutely ate like the Rockefellers. I don't know about your father, but Sunny Tasha, Herman Tasha, and my father all went hunting. So we were eating things like venison, quail and pheasant, fish, scallops and lobster, and thinking, 'Can't we just have macaroni and cheese?' No one starved, because even if the price of fish was through the floor, you could at least eat it. They might not be getting paid for it, but…

Kathie: Well, when we owned a fishing boat in one of the early years of my marriage, I can remember, I was taking a course at the Cape Cod community college. Unexpectedly, my instructor and a few friends showed up at my door. I didn't have any money. I didn't have anything in the house. All I had was lobster. *[Laughter.]* They came in the door and I said, "Well, why don't you stay for lunch, but umm…all I have to give you is lobster." They said, "Oh, all she's got is lobster!" And I said, "Really, all I have is lobster. I have no bread to put it on. I have no mayonnaise. But if you like lobster, we'll just make a big plate of lobster." They said, "We think we can handle it." It was literally all we had. I remember eating fish when we had the fishing boat. I said, as you just said, "Well, at least we have fish." And my husband Richard said, "Well, that's the most

expensive fish per pound you've ever eaten. It's costing us a huge mortgage." But that's what you've got. We never starved, that's for sure.

Susan: Well, you know, Provincetown was really pretty much a classless town. There were a very few families that had a few extra dollars, but the rest of us were all in the same boat.

Kathie: Yeah, you didn't sense that you didn't have money. You just didn't have money.

The four women grew up together in Provincetown, a home for them insulated geographically and culturally, a so-called "island" that young girls rarely left, three families and four girls. The four became linked with the children of Sunny and Herman Tasha. This connected them to Tasha Hill in Provincetown, where the Tashas lived, a wooded "dogpatch" of paths and small cottages built by Sunny Tasha "with her own two hands." It also connected them to Harry Kemp, the "Poet of the Dunes," spending his waning years on Tasha Hill. Likewise, they became connected to the Kemp shack, soon to be passed to the Tasha family at Harry Kemp's death. These family connections were traced out for me when we arrived at the Tasha shack, sitting on the sand to eat our sack lunches. For the four women, the connections reached both backward and forward through time, the newest generations intertwined by marriage, called an "eerie" full circle:

Kathie: I'll try to remember what I said on the hillside. It just sort of pours out. I'm Kathie Joseph Meads. My maiden name is Joseph and I've lived all my life in Provincetown. I was born here on Winslow Street in Provincetown in my grandmother's house. My parents are Anthony and Alice Joseph. My father was a Portuguese fisherman – is a Portuguese fisherman. He's still alive. My mother just passed away in May. She was from Boston, here as a young college graduate just before she was entering her masters program in Boston, at Boston College, and worked for the summer where she met my father right after WWII, and fell in love, here in Provincetown that summer. As my sister Maureen had said earlier, my dad proposed to her in a dory he stole off the beach, out in the middle of the harbor. She just never went back to Boston. So in many ways, what I think is unique about our situation, Maureen and I, is that we had a real marriage of cultures in our household. It wasn't always an easy relationship for them, but for the children growing up in that environment, we experienced Provincetown in all of its diversity, from a very early age. My mother sought out her intellectual, artistic friends, and my father's side of the family were very traditional Portuguese and were very much encouraging those values. So there was always a constant clash in that household of those values.

Through my mother's friends, we became very involved with the Cozzis, who are the parents of Theo. On the Portuguese side, we met Susan Leonard. Her dad was a fisherman. And Paula Tasha's family, who were again another mixture of cultures, the Tashas, with Herman's Portuguese background. So we had quite a unique experience as children growing up. The dunes for us became our playground, our place for adventure. Thanks to the Tasha family, we had free access to this dune shack at all times, and we made the most of it. So many of our life's experiences were blended into what we learned here in the dunes. And they go on. It continues on and teaches us today.

Theo: Well, my family came here to study with [the artist] Henry Hensche, along with Salvatore Del Deo. My father ended up opening a restaurant, Ciro and Sal's, with Sal Del Deo. So I grew up with my parents both in the art community and the restaurant community. Kathie, as she said, her mother and my mother became fast friends and did everything together because they had children all at the same age. Kathie and I are the same age, my sister Michael and Maureen are the same age, and Anthony and my brother

Peter were the same age. So they took us to Beach Forest hiking, and out to High Head picking blueberries, and out foraging for mushrooms. At some point, because my parents worked a lot at the restaurant, they hired Paula's oldest sister Carla Tasha to baby-sit for us. We were quite young at the time. She started bringing us to Tasha Hill [the Tasha residence in Provincetown], and that's how we met Paula and Paul and the whole rest of the family. I brought Kathie, Maureen, and Anthony into it. We all became fast friends, all of us, the whole group. My brother, Paul, and Anthony were all very good friends.

Sunny Tasha kind of took over as the matriarch. We were always free to go to her house at any time, and stay there for days if we wanted to, at Tasha Hill. She always had a big pot of beans on the stove and homemade loaves of bread in the oven, and you knew it was there for anyone who wanted it. There was always food on the stove. And she started taking us on these forays out to the dune shack. I remember sleeping outside and getting wet by the dew. We always had hot dogs and ketchup and she had her tea. Herman Tasha put a pump in for water. There was a natural spring in a hollow and we used to pump water. We had the dogs with us at all times, especially if we came out here on our own. It was a great experience. We spent a great deal of time out here, and together at the Tasha's [house]. It was kind of like a second home. I spent a whole summer living with the Tashas when my mother moved to Springfield. Kathie and I have been best friends since we were two years old, and Maureen and Michael, and Susan. There's a huge connection there.

Interestingly enough, it's evolved, because when I had my first child, Kathie and Maureen and I came out here with my infant son and stayed here for several days, out here in this very shack. And now he's engaged to be married to Ariel, Paula Tasha's niece, and they come out here and spend a lot of time at this shack. She called me one day this summer and said, "We're out here and we see the note that you and Maureen and Kathie and Susan wrote in the ledger, when you were out here for Maureen's birthday." And there it is. [She reads from the shack's logbook.] It says: "May 21st 2002. Back again, the old gang. How many years ago when we romped here as kids and ate Sunny's sweet dune pea soup. Maureen's birthday party, fifty-second. Thanks Paul, Paula, Carl, and Carla. We remember. Signed, Kathie, Susan, Theo, and Maureen." So, Ariel called me on her cell phone and said that she was reading that. And then she wrote: "May 15, 2004. In the midst of all the bullshit the best thing is to be able to get away and truly be free. What a wonderful day – high 60s and a brisk cooling wind. Draka (that's their dog), Drew (my son), Brian, and I are all out and about waiting until the tide is just right for the bite. Drew and I are spending the night, trying to escape the gradually filling P-town as summer nears. Signed, Ariel."

And then this is written six days later, the 21st of May, by the girlfriend of Brian who they had brought out with them. It says: "Came here with Ariel, Andrew, Brandon, and Brian." Brandon is my *other* son. "Went fishing until the sun set. Brian and I stayed. We had lobster claws and wine. What a beautiful night. I'm from New York and have spent summers camping here since I was born. Truro and Provincetown hold a special place in my heart and this night was a culmination of that feeling. It was hard for me to leave my family and friends for the summer, but being here has made me realize why I came back, and will until the day I die. The sky, the beach, the ocean are my church where I feel connected to all that is true in life. Thank you for the memorable first night for our summer together. Signed, Suzanne."

So, this is like another generation connection. And it's really eerie for me. Now, after all of these years of being connected by friendship, we're actually going to be connected by marriage. It's sort of come full circle.

Susan: I'm Susan Leonard. I grew up here and spent most of my life here. Even when I wasn't here, I was here. Even when I was in far away places, there was always a comfort in knowing and remembering Provincetown and the dunes. I lived for a time in Quito, Ecuador, at ten thousand feet. So I would never forget where I came from, in bed, trying to get to sleep, I would start in the East End of Provincetown and literally remember and go house to house to house, and street corner to street corner, and remember all the names of the streets, and all the people that I knew who lived in every house I could think of, from East End to West End. Interestingly enough, I ran into Mary P. Roderick walking into town the other day. Mary P. Roderick is 98 years old, and she can walk as fast as you and I. And I said something to her about remembering Provincetown. And she said, "Do you know Mary Viera and I used to sit in front of town hall, and Mary would say, 'OK, it's time to remember. Remember that house? Do you remember who lived on the corner?'" And I was like, 'Oh my god, I thought only I was the crazy one who would do that, to remember!' And here are two women in their nineties, who are like, "Don't you remember? Don't you remember?"

My father was born here in Provincetown in a house in the East End. His great grandfather came here from the Azores in about 1870. That's that side of the family. My mother's family has been living in Eastham [on Cape Cod] longer than Eastham has been a town. Talk about two cultures. It was almost as extreme as Maureen and Kathie's. You've got Yankee, seriously Yankee, Methodist, from Eastham. My poor mother moved to Provincetown. I'm sure she didn't even know what hit her.

I have to say, people ask me about my family, "What side do you relate to the most?" You know, those Yankees were really drab. *[Laughter]* I mean, my Portuguese heritage is probably what I recognize first and foremost. But we can't discount the other. One is really a little more prominent in my way of life.

I grew up here not knowing anyone but my cousins until I met Maureen and Kathie at the beach, fifty years ago, with my raccoon cap on and their mother shelling green beans from the garden. That's when we were about four years old. Kathie hadn't gone to first grade yet. That was my introduction to that family. And we've been together ever since. But I think it was late in life when I met Theo, I think I was eight or nine. Paula Tasha probably was about second grade. It seems to me that she was in my class.

We all spent so much time in each other's homes. As I was saying earlier, it was like, I put it in Latin terms, "co-madres," where women have the right to raise each other's children and explain life to them in the terms in which they see it. When I got to go to Sunny Tasha's house, that was like a theme park compared to my house. There was stuff you never saw before. There were things written on the blackboard every day. Remember the black board?

Kathie: She always wrote a saying, a quote from the bible across the blackboard, across the top.

Susan: Or Tennyson or someone.

Kathie: I always remember a bible quote. I know that she must have had the poets. When you sat down, the bulletin board was above the kitchen table, so when you sat to eat you were supposed to reflect on this quote.

Susan: But that house had things in it! I mean, did you see those things in your own house? *[Laughter]* She exposed us to things that we'd never ever seen. It was something that was so special and odd and peculiar. It was just one more thing in your life that would become part of you. Harry. Harry Kemp. You walk in and here's this guy wrapped up in this cloak. He sat in the big rocking chair, or in front of the fire of the pot-bellied stove. He didn't say a whole heck of a lot. But you knew it was a presence. This was a presence.

We see in these introductions several windows into the society of Provincetown as experienced by the four women. It's small-town and insular, so familiar to its long-term residents that, eyes closed, its streets and families can be visualized and named from one end to the other. It's culturally rich, containing influences from Old Yankees, Portuguese, and its seasonal art colony. It's economically poor, with family life connected to the not-so-abundant sea, the perpetually-impoverished arts, the summer-season restaurants, and the small, immediate countryside with its gleanings of berries, mushrooms, and shellfish. Overall, it's a society proud of its tolerance of cultural pluralism in neighbors, even while its families frequently roil internally with the blending and clashing of traditions. Extended kinship ties and long-term friendships provide the language of connectedness for Provincetown.

Susan called her mother and Sunny Tasha, "co-madres." Theo called Sunny Tasha a "matriarch." Each understood that Sunny Tasha was the female in charge on Tasha Hill. Sunny Tasha took them in, like she took in Harry Kemp. Fed them. Wrote inspirational quotes for them on the blackboard above the kitchen table. She exposed them to wonderful things. And she instructed them. But what they were taught were not old, normative traditions. As little girls, they were taught to question authority. They were given skills for breaking free of social restrictions, so that they might develop into strong, educated, and confident women. Sunny Tasha was Lithuanian, a Catholic-animist by way of the coal-mining towns of Pennsylvania, married into the Portuguese culture of Provincetown. Hers was a two-culture household, rich and at times, tempestuous. Kathie and Maureen came from a two-culture household, their Boston Irish mother swept away by a Portuguese fisherman in a stolen skiff. Susan Leonard came from a two-culture household, her mother an old Yankee Methodist from up cape in Eastham marrying into the Provincetown Portuguese – "she didn't even know what hit her." And Theo Cozzi's family added to the cultural mix, a family of artists with Italian roots drawn by the Provincetown art colony. At this time, Provincetown displayed several divisions, East End and West End, Yankee and Portuguese, the kids from a particular side expected to beat up the kids from another side. The artist's colony, primarily a summertime society, intertwined with this. Small-town Provincetown was not a unitary community. It was culturally layered and commonly contentious.

Childhood Training

As described by the four women, Sunny Tasha's instructions were designed to help young girls see their way through the turmoil and restrictions inherent in the small town's social divisions and old traditions, not necessarily to reject them, but to question them, to successfully negotiate them as strong, independent women. The instruction was modeled after her own life experiences. Sunny Tasha regularly retreated to the dunes. The dunes, and the Kemp shack at the fringe of Provincetown, were her places of refuge. They also were her designated proving grounds for the next generation of children from Tasha Hill, especially the young girls.

At mid-century, gender roles for boys and girls in Provincetown were channeled by expectations of future occupations. The expectation still was that local boys would become fishermen. Girls would not. Men went to sea. Women stood on high points prayerfully watching the stormy horizons for returning fleets. Boys got little boats for play. Girls did not. These were mainstream expectations in Provincetown. But Sunny Tasha had additional things in mind for her charges. Like the bohemian artists and writers with whom she associated, Sunny Tasha pushed her children into the raw, unruly dunes, to impress upon them the joy of maverick self-confidence. The boys had the sea. The girls had the dunes. As co-madre and matriarch, her self-appointed task was training women by pushing them to the fringes of Provincetown. In hindsight, walking into the dunes, sitting at the Tasha shack, the women reflected on these childhood instructions:

Kathie: This is just a reflection back on childhood. Maybe everybody else will want to expound on it a little bit. There was enough tradition left [at that time]. We were pre-women's rights movement. But we had Sunny Tasha. And she was the premier women's rights.

Susan: Didn't she give us a glimpse into that world?

Kathie: She certainly did. I'm sure the Tashas told you how she built those cottages in her yard. I was always so impressed by the fact that she went searching out church windows. She would go everywhere when she heard that there was a church being demolished. She'd search out stained glass windows that she liked. Or she'd go to a demolition yard and she'd search out windows. She'd bring them back and position them on the lot in the best position for the light that she wanted, and then build the house around that. She did. It supplemented their income, their little rentals.

As for the boys and the sea – boys were allowed to get a little boat and get out on the water when girls weren't really encouraged to do that. So as our brothers were moving out, getting their little outboard motor, allowed to go diving for money at the end of the pier first, allowed to do these things, we gravitated toward the dunes. This was our adventure land out here. We could come out here. We could bring a dog with us. We could leave Tasha Hill, make our way through the woods, and head out to the dunes and be gone for the day. We could experience our own growth in an adventurous sort of way, out here on the dunes.

Maureen: You could go wherever you wanted to go.

Kathie: I remember we used to stop at this place we called the Moving Island, which was really Jimmy's Pond. We were light enough, young enough, so you could walk on the gunk on the top, kind of balance yourself.

Maureen: It was really a quaking bog, we found out years later.

Kathie: Then all of a sudden, you'd go down! We'd be full of mud. Anytime you slowed down, your leg would go down. So it would be a real challenge to see if you could get all the way across the moving island without your leg sinking in. And then we'd start screaming, "There are turtles under here!" Then the big thing was, we'd go across the dunes to go swimming, with the stinking mud drying on you, walking across, and then we'd get to the other side and jump in the water!

I remember Sunny used to say, "Don't forget to stop by and say 'hello' to Harry." Oh my god, ah jeeze, "OK, alright." So we'd stop. Once in a while he'd want to talk. Lots of times he wouldn't want to talk and he'd just go, "Yah, hi," and then we'd just like keep running down to the water. Well, maybe that was her way of checking on us and we

didn't even realize it. Maybe she'd say to Harry later, "Hey, did you see the kids?" Yeah, I never thought of that. Now as a parent, I guess I would do it that way.

I remember there would be people out here too. And we didn't know what they were doing out there. They were like, you know, nude sunbathers and all that stuff. I can remember we used to make a big circle around them and just walk real quiet if we saw a couple or something. But we didn't really talk about it. You know, it was just our playground. We just came out here for the day. It was a safe place.

Susan: Don't you think that the focus of the water for boys was really, at that point in history, our fathers or our grandfathers still expected that their sons would be the next generation of fishermen? I think they were pointed, they were encouraged, they were gaining skills they didn't even know they were gaining – being able to row a boat, being able to run outboard motors, to sink a boat and right it again and not drown.

Kathie: But Sunny, she had this wonderful way. I'm sure she had a level of control, now as a parent you can reflect back. I'm sure that she had a level of control. But we felt that we had complete freedom. It was just a wonderful feeling when she'd say, "Take a dog." We always took dogs with us. The girls would take dogs and we'd head out over the dunes. She would sort of give us just some basic ingredients, like a few little things to put together for a meal, and we'd be out here on our own. She worked at the Flagship, she was waiting on table, and she would come out afterwards and join us for the night, late at night, and we'd be out here for the evening. We'd go swimming or we'd be making our dinner, and we'd be camping out here for the night. When I look back on it, I'm sure that feeling at being home in nature, feeling that sense of being able to have an adventure of your own, she helped develop all those skills.

I'll never forget one weekend at her house. We were probably twelve years old. She said to us, "How many of you have ever seen the mountains?" As Maureen has said earlier, we didn't go anywhere. We'd never seen the mountains. So she walked back out of the other room and she put a roadmap on the table and we sat down, Paula, Michael, myself. And she laid this roadmap out and said, "Those are the White Mountains, this is Maine, this is New Hampshire, and this is Vermont. Next weekend we're going to the mountains. You decide where you want to go." And there we were at twelve years old with a pen, and we wrote up a map. She took the map and we went on the exact roads that we had mapped out. We traveled up the coast of Maine a little, went across, we saw the sun set on Mt. Washington. She didn't want us to deviate from that at all. She wanted to show us that we could write our own trip and go and have this exploration. That was the first time I'd ever seen the mountains. I still love the mountains. That's the kind of thing she did as a parent that I think just opened our eyes. And the dunes were the start of all of it.

Susan: She gave us a set of survival skills that we didn't even know that she was giving to us.

Theo: And a sense of independence.

Susan: She taught us to question authority. Really. Just because it was a law, written on a paper, it didn't necessarily mean it should be accepted as written.

Maureen: And this dune shack is a testament to that. This shack would be gone.

Kathie: It strikes me that someone as special as Sunny Tasha, her way of life and the contribution she made to our whole generation, the way we grew up, is every bit as

important as a lovely poem that was composed out here by Harry Kemp, or a painter's inspired painting. Because they may have inspired the people who were reading their poems, or they may have inspired the people who saw their paintings, but Sunny inspired a whole generation of children and friends. Her legacy is just as important to preserve as those written testaments of poets or the paintings. This shack is that legacy – the legacy of openness, and sharing, and the taste for adventure, and most important, the way she developed in us our ability to feel that we were up to the challenge of these adventures. That we could become self-reliant. That even though we were young girls and we weren't, as we spoke earlier, allowed yet out on the water in our little motorboats, we could come to the dunes. We could spend the night on the dunes. We would have the tools that were necessary later on.

Maybe we ought to spend a little time reflecting on how these experiences as children better prepared us, how we feel they prepared our own children to go out and meet the world. For Susan to find the courage to take off to go to Ecuador on her own and set up a life. All of us in our own way. Because we shared these common traditions as children. The skills we learned growing up in the dunes and having this freedom propelled us all off in many, many different directions. I think we recognize that and brought that into our parenting, and tried to bring that to our children. And our children recognize some of that value out here. But Sunny was the start of it all. This legacy that she's left with this dune shack is just going to continue on, from one generation to another, as much as Harry's poems are, or as much as those wonderful paintings are that were inspired out here in the dunes.

Cultural Survival

For these four women, the childhood experiences in the dunes have become interwoven with the preservation of Portuguese and Yankee traditions of Provincetown. Over the last decade or so, the four women have worked hard to preserve the concept of Old Provincetown and its traditions. Non-conventionality was consistent with fighting for local traditions. Sunny Tasha inculcated traditions, scratching bible verses on the kitchen blackboard for children and reenacting the Pilgrims' first washday each year dressed in period costumes, reinforcing local heritages and time-tested knowledge. The four women perceived local traditions as being threatened by outside forces. They struggled alongside others in Provincetown to secure a future for their living heritage. The preservation of the dune shacks and their continued uses for year-round residents were parts of this struggle for Old Provincetown. The four women spoke about this effort, sitting in front of the Tasha shack:

Maureen: There are so few things I feel that are left that are visible for us to pass down to the generations. The fishing industry has really dwindled. It used to be that every single one of us had somebody in the family who got their living fishing, at least one person. Now really, we'd have to think for a minute to see if there are any of us left anymore. So here's the right of passage of the dunes, and trying to make our children understand what it was like, what that connection is like, and what their heritage is.

I recently got involved in the Provincetown Portuguese Festival. I'm on the committee for that. Theo's dad and Sal did a fundraiser for us at the Red Inn this year. It was Ciro and Sal together again, and they were so happy to do it. They said without the fishermen, the artists would not have survived in this town. It's that whole melting and that whole coming together, of all the different people.

We had a Portuguese artist, John Debrito from California, who's an immigrant Portuguese artist from the Azores. He came this year. He said, "What can you show me that would give me a feeling? I want to paint Provincetown for the festival." Well, I said, "I have to take you to the dunes." And I took him out. This was in April. [She searches and finds an entry in the Tasha shack logbook, and reads.] "Paul, First trip out to welcome spring. The above is a new friend and artist. Please come and meet him opening night of the Portuguese Festival. As always, I am so grateful the shack is still here. Many blessings to you and your family. Thank you, Maureen." Then John wrote something to him in Portuguese, which I don't know what it is. He did pictures, paintings of the dunes and the dune shacks. They were exhibited this year at the festival. It all ties in. It's all part of Provincetown. It's all part of our childhood. I really feel that we need to preserve the things that visually we can see, and our senses, everything, for our children. This is honestly one of the few things that are left for us to pass on.

Kathie: I remember not that many years ago, we were at a town meeting, debating a building that's now going to be the Provincetown Public Library. They're working on it in the center of town. But in the beginning it was a Methodist Church. Then it was the Walter P. Chrysler Art Museum. Then, after he picked up his collection and moved south, the building was abandoned. So we began the Heritage Museum. It was a noble effort. Josephine Del Deo was one of the trustees that started the Heritage Museum there. All of these collections were brought in. It was a beautiful little museum of our old culture. The *Rose Dorthea* was built within it, this large indoor model ship. But then, a number of years ago, the Heritage Museum had kind of folded up a bit, and closed up, and they didn't know what to do with this big building. At one point there was an organization that wanted to buy it for a theatre. There was a whole move afoot to sell the building to this private company for a theatre.

I was at the town meeting, debating back and forth, what will happen to our culture and our heritage and all of our collection? They wanted to take the *Rose Dorthea*, pick it up, move it to the end of the pier, and put it in a Plexiglas dome. Some of these were really ridiculous ideas. They said, "We can't afford to hold on to it any longer." And one person got up and said, "It needs to be said that Provincetown is known worldwide, has a worldwide reputation for its fine art. It's artists and writers who have been here, and some of these people are well received in Europe, and this and that, and Provincetown is a place of the arts, and that is what it has evolved to, and we should support the arts, and we should get this theatre and help to get it on its feet, and I say we should sell it to the theatre." The position that was being taken about Provincetown being the center of the arts really struck a [sour] chord in me, enraged me a bit. So I got up and said, "I would like to say to the previous speaker that it's true that Provincetown is now well known for its arts and isn't that a wonderful thing. But I'd also like to remind him that the very men that sailed on the *Rose Dorthea*, and our fishing heritage, are the ones that fed those poor starving artists before they became rich and famous in Europe and elsewhere." So the building got to stay, after the discussion sort of went in that vein. And now it's going to be the library. I think it's a great use for the building.

The Heritage Collection is now being held in town buildings. It's being proposed that it go to the Pilgrim Monument Association. There's a little bit of debate about that. There's concern that they really need to remain the property of Provincetown. It's important that Provincetown holds on to these little bits. See, bit by bit, everything's going. And the more they don't know the past, the more they don't see the importance of

holding on, which is the problem with everything that's happening, including the dunes. Everything changes, and we realize that, everything changes and nothing stays the same, but it's such a beautiful wealth of history here.

Susan: And to that point, the Provincetown Portuguese Festival was revitalized about nine years ago by my cousins and several other people. Maureen has been doing things with it for a couple of years, and Maureen really knows how to get me going. So I had this vision of re-instituting the parading with the banners, the procession from church down to the pier, for the blessing of the fleet. There used to be a big procession of the banners. I'm a chiropractor and I have people who are my captive audience for about twenty minutes. There are enough people from Provincetown who see me that I began to say, "Do you have your grandfather's banner, the banner from your grandfather's boat?" And one woman goes, "Yeah, I know exactly where it is." [A photograph dated 1948 from a guidebook is shown to me.]

That's how it used to look. There were hundreds of fisherman who used to march. Hundreds of fisherman marched with their banners. Each boat had a banner. They would escort the bishop down to the pier after the Mass was served to bless the boats. I couldn't wait until I was old enough to march with my father. It was such a thrill.

And so, this year I called the captain of the boat that my father fished on for close to thirty years. I asked him if we could be in the procession with the banner this year. [Points to a recent picture.] This is me. And my brother. And one of the captain's nephews. You'll see some other people in there that you'll recognize. And there were only what, a half a dozen of us this year? But it made such a huge impression on the people who live here and remembered. It was just fabulous.

Kathie: [Pointing to a statue, carried in the procession.] And there's St. Peter.
Wolfe: Who holds St. Peter? The church?
Maureen: Yep.
Susan: They got a new lightweight version a few years ago.
Susan: And this gentleman, he's been coming every year since he was small.
Kathie: In memory of his dad.
Maureen: This is my mother's banner, from my mother's boat… my father's boat.
Susan: That's me and my brother and the captain's nephew.
Wolfe: So you revitalized this tradition just this year?
Susan: Yes. And there was a woman and her husband parked on the side of the road as we were coming through, going towards the pier. I think both of them were in high school with my dad. And she saw us coming but I don't think she realized, there was a band in front of us, and something else. She saw us coming. And did you hear her? She just went – gasp! She was speechless. Absolutely speechless. She was wiping her eyes. She was crying. I'm crying. I turn around and look at these two and they're crying. Everybody's crying.
Maureen: We were carrying my mother's banner right behind her. The woman had just been taking care of my mother in the manor. And my mother had just died. All of this was really nice.
Susan: And my brother – I called him. This is my half brother. My father remarried and so I'm twenty-three years older than he is and we haven't had that many things that we've done together as brother and sister. I called him and I told him this is what we're doing, and this is a really big honor that Joe's going to let us carry this, and we have to do this for Dad. [Susan starts crying.] And he did....

Kathie: He did. It was nice to see you guys do that. And this is my mother...
Maureen: We're all going to start crying. [Maureen starts crying.]
Susan: This is what it's all about.

The depth of feeling for family and local traditions is evident in this exchange. The symbols of family and tradition, such as the banners of family boats processing with the Bishop for the Provincetown Portuguese Festival, evoke an outpouring of memory and emotion. Like the banners, the dune shacks too have become symbolic of Old Provincetown. They evoke similar upwellings of emotion. They currently are symbols of a way of life for a small community perceived to be endangered. I asked how large the Portuguese community was in Provincetown and its environs:

Susan: It was very big. Now it's kind of dwindling.
Maureen: I'd say it's twenty-five percent Portuguese now. A lot of people have moved to Truro, but Provincetown is still the center. Truro is like a suburb, sort of.
Susan: There's only about 3,500 people who live here year-round anyway in Provincetown. I'd say two to three thousand Portuguese between here and Truro, don't you think?
Kathie: Oh yeah, at least. The Provincetown heritage is still very strong here.
Susan: It just kind of gets buried or overshadowed by the new money.
Maureen: Yeah, we are trying to maintain our history. That's why we got involved in the festival. And Theo [who is not Portuguese] is involved. The whole project that we call the Provincetown Portuguese Festival isn't just a celebration of being Portuguese. You don't have to have been born here. It's for everybody. Ciro and Sal are helping. Everybody is helping. All you need is a passion for Provincetown. So many people have that. There are a lot of new people who have bought property in Provincetown who have that. They think they've died and gone to heaven when they landed here. Those are the kind of people that we just embrace. They want to hear it, they want to know, and they want to add to the community. So, it's not dead. It's not a dead thing. It's just that there are a lot of other people that have a lot more money, or who are just summer residents here to make a lot of money, and they don't want to know about the dune shacks, or the Portuguese, or the school, or what's happening. But that's not all there is. There's definitely a whole group that's passionate about Provincetown. And they all come and help with the festival. It's there for everybody.

One pressure on the full-time residents of Provincetown today is "new money," a term referring to the latest wave of moneyed in-migrants from off cape who are buying up property in Provincetown for seasonal homes. Rents and taxes have increased substantially, squeezing the older generations of year-round residents with more modest incomes. Maureen describes how she is one of the displaced, forced by economic pressure to move up cape:

Maureen: I'm an example of that. I live in Eastham now. When my house sold in Provincetown, I really couldn't find anything that I could buy within my means to stay in town. And I work in town. I've worked here at the Council on Aging for sixteen years. So I commute. Provincetown is home. Eastham – I love my little house and everything, but you know my life is really here. I'm grateful and lucky that we have my parents' house and some day that'll be an option to come back somehow. But my children, I don't know how they'll ever be able to come back. So these little trips [to the dunes] and these little things take on even more meaning. I don't know how our kids will ever be able to stay here. I know somehow they will find a way, but it's going to be very difficult.

Kathie: My son is fortunate enough that I had a piece of land behind my home that he could build on. When I asked him, was he was sure that he wanted to build his home in Provincetown? He just finished this year. He said, "Absolutely!" I was concerned about that, because I thought there aren't as many younger families. The schools are experiencing a real decline in enrollment. They don't know how long they'll be able to hang on. Is this where he'd really want to settle? But he was adamant. And he's a world traveler. He has been everywhere. He said, "No, I want to be in Provincetown. This is where I want to be." And it's largely because of the things that we're talking about today – the culture that he had as a child, that I think, in the back of his mind, even though he has no children yet, he's anticipating already that he's going to be able to share with his children, and pass it on.

Susan: Don't you feel like an endangered species? The people who are now buying property here, are living in it or not living in it. It's an investment they hang onto it for a few years, and they sell it for a huge profit. Someone else comes along and does the same thing. You go through Provincetown in the winter and there are no lights on anywhere. They're all second homes, third homes. Or they rent it out on a weekly basis. There's no commitment, no commitment to the emotional piece of Provincetown that I feel. That's how I see it.

And here's my poor mother. They're selling the property next to her. They've got a price tag on it for just under $900,000 dollars. You know, it spans Pleasant Street to Montello Street. It's a big lot, big for Provincetown, probably big enough to put another house on. What's that going to do to the evaluation of her property? She's just trying to live in her home. Meanwhile, her taxes are going to go up phenomenally. If that property gets sold for just under a million dollars, you know what it does to her property evaluation. It gets bumped up another notch. So she's living in a home that's probably going to be worth more than $600,000, and the floors are sagging, the pipes freeze in the winter, and certainly there's not enough money to brace the building and get the floors straight ever again in her lifetime. I just feel like there are so few of us left. Like Kathie said earlier, it seems like all the powers that be are trying to put us out of existence.

As portrayed by these statements, the economic squeeze threatens the traditional community and culture at Provincetown. As a Provincetown resident with long local roots, Susan says she feels like "an endangered species." The driving force behind Kathie's son's determination to remain in Provincetown is this endangered heritage, "the culture he had as a child," and his strong desire to "pass it on" to his own children some day.

A second pressure on the traditions were regulations, according to the four women. The women described their frustration over restrictions of their ways of living on the lower cape. Kathie provided details about Susan's assertion that "it seems like all the powers that be are trying to put us out of existence."

Kathie: That's a good point to get back to. I think that the essence of the dunes experience is an experience of freedom. It's experiencing your own personal form of freedom, whatever that is. I'm a little resentful that our dune experience is being herded… I think that's the word I used…

Maureen: Boxed in.

Kathie: [Speaks like she's reciting a set of rules.] 'We will all experience the dunes in this same way.' 'We will all walk across the same path to the ocean.' 'We will not transgress.' ' We will not walk on this old path or walk on that old path.' 'We will refrain from harm to the environment in so far as we will not allow you to pick your

beach plums anymore.' 'Your experience will be the same as the person from Idaho or Iowa or whatever.' And why is that? That is because we are a National Park that belongs to everybody and we are all supposed to treat everyone equally?

But I want to make the point that was not the understanding of the people of Provincetown. This was to be a National Seashore. The legislation for this was different. It was recognized that it wasn't a wilderness area. There were cultural, deeply-embedded cultural traditions here that we were assured would continue. We welcomed the Seashore with open arms under those terms. But we have gradually felt the squeeze, that we have no right any different than anyone else. And that lies at the crux of the dune shack issue, to imagine that this shack is going to be taken away from the Tasha family, even with its wide open doors to anyone who wants to approach it, that it's still going to be taken away and regulated to the point where we will not be able to stop by here and have our moments ever again. Or to the point that we'll have to be relegated into the box of an artist. Or we're relegated into having only a specific purpose and time that we can be here for, if we can get in here at all. That is such a sadness. It's going to drive away further the people that are trying to stay, if they can no longer have it.

Maureen: Part of our inspiration is our acceptance of everybody and our trust for everybody. When we made this agreement [about the Seashore], I can remember my mother saying we're one of the only towns on the Cape that didn't ask for a beach for ourselves. This was because we believed what was said to us: "You will be able to continue." Everybody said, "Ok, great, that's great, that sounds great." And we've done that over and over and over again. It seems that we're losing more and more and more. So the very thing that makes Provincetown so special seems to be our destruction. It's so frustrating. It's like, "but you promised." We feel like little kids, "but wait a minute, you promised." Now we can't do this. Now we can't do that. All of these little things that are our identity, that inspire us to stay here.

I have a daughter who gave up a big corporate job in Boston to come home and write. She's trying to make it running a little restaurant. I mean there's just thousands and thousands of stories like that, that are getting to be maybe a hundred, two hundred. This [the dune shack] is one little piece of our history, one little tiny piece, that we want to preserve. And it just really seems almost like we are a tribe, like an Indian reservation, like, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, we're here, we're still here!"

Susan: How many people do you meet, who, when you tell them that you grew up here, they look at you, and they say, "I didn't know that anyone lived here?" They literally say, "I didn't think any one lives here."

Theo: I work in inns now as an innkeeper. I've worked in five different ones. I get that response constantly. "You grew up here? There really are real natives that grew up here?" It seems the concept now is just the rich and famous and money. It's just sort of like, "Little people, how do you manage?" Well, we work two and three jobs sometimes to make it to live here.

Maureen: And what makes that so important? It's not Commercial Street. It's the dunes. It's the water. It's Race Point. It's Long Point. It's staying overnight at the lighthouse. And that's another whole story. Provincetown seems to be losing its little grasp on that.

Susan: We're working hard at it, though.

Theo: Well, it's come full circle. When my parents came here, came here not only to study with Henry Hensche, but they came here because this was the place that artists could

actually come and thrive on no money. They could do their art. They got mussels from the breakwater, free fish from the fisherman at the pier. They gave free fish to anyone who came to the end of the pier. They dug clams off the flat. They would never have made it in those early years without doing that. It was a place where you could come and survive. You can't do that anymore. You have to almost work around the clock in order to stay here. It is that we're a dying breed.

Kathie: It's these little bits of traditions that we hold on to that keep us here, and keep our families here, and keep us coming back. And there are so many people that do get it. You start to talk to them. They say, "You're so lucky." And we know how lucky we are. We know how lucky we are. But this dune shack brings all of that out in us, when we get out here, because we realize how threatened we are. When we hear that the very existence of this dune shack is threatened, it brings up all these emotions of what else is threatened in our lives. The whole threat – it just grows: the dune shack's going, our way of life's going, our existence in Provincetown is going.

As seen in these statements, the four women have worked to preserve living traditions, ways of living that are diminished and threatened but that still exist. Evidence of living traditions is seen in their children's decisions to live in Provincetown and the lower cape, despite the difficulties. The women reported that they fight to preserve the traditions not just for themselves, but for the next generation. And based on the notes in the dune shack logbooks, their young-adult children were acquiring some of their parents' uses of the dunes. The cultural patterns were appearing in the next generation:

Maureen: I think to all of us it represents privacy, it represents a camaraderie, it's where you go, it's a holy sacred place, the dunes for us, I think. And for my children, too. I have three daughters, and there are pictures in the photo album, the youngest one washing dishes at Sal Del Deo's shack, and Courtney and Gretchen coming out for my birthday party. I look forward to bringing my grandchildren Jack and Sailor out. It's part of what makes growing up here so special, all of these rights of passage.

Kathie: The real proof in that is that our children are coming out here and experiencing those same feelings of introspection and growth. They become important milestones for them, as well. These are not places that we bring our children and they say, "OK Mom, we're going do the 'family thing' and make a visit there and we already did that." They gravitate back out here as well. So we know that the continuity, what the dunes had done for us, is being done again in this generation, as it was passed on to us by Sunny and the Tasha family.

Maureen: [Shows some family pictures in a photo album from her backpack, of scenes at the dune shacks.] This is my youngest daughter, when she came out to visit Kathie and her late husband Richard. She's washing dishes. This is the youngest one. Her name is Halcyone. And that's her there. And let's see…

Kathie: And that was not at this shack. That was at Josephine Del Deo's shack.

Maureen: [Pointing out more photographs.] This is my oldest daughter Gretchen. This is for my 50th birthday. The kids came out one night too and slept overnight. This is my daughter Courtney, the middle one. She was out here. This is actually the happiest I've seen her – she was going through a divorce at the time. So it really is, I mean it's a place to gather and go through all the stuff. There's Kathie, my sister. That's me. This is the Tasha's [shack]. This was the big storm I arrived in. I was soaking wet. It was really blowing and really raining, but it was great.

I remember when Sunny [Tasha] was sick. Paul saw me on the street and he said that his mother was so happy, because he had brought the logbooks to her so she could read them. When they were full he'd bring them in for her to read. And she saw the entry from my daughter, Courtney, when she was in New Orleans and she came up. I came out a few days later and wrote her a little message that the Courtney who wrote was my daughter. Sunny was so pleased to see that. So it really is being passed on to the generations.

Continuing Connections

The personal connections to the dunes extend across generations for these women, looking backward and forwards. They are still discovering linkages. Susan Leonard was "thrilled" to recently discover details of her family connections with the Peaked Hill Coast Guard Station. The Tasha shack, by oral tradition, was the hen house of the station:

Susan: I was thrilled to find out something recently. I never met my grandfather. He died when my father was a boy. I knew that he was in the coast guard, but no one ever elaborated on it. Just recently I found out that he was stationed out here at Peaked Hill. He's on the U.S. census for 1930, stationed at Peaked Hill Station. I nearly cried. I was like, oh my god! He walked on that same sand that I walked on.

The coast guard, the life saving station, and all of the men, I think all but one of the men, on this list from the 1930s census, is Portuguese. It just so happens all the crew are Portuguese, while the head chief, the chief officer of the Peaked Hill station, happens to have the last name of Mayo. Mayo is a really old Yankee name. So even then you've got this division of Yankee and Portuguese. There are some names here that were anglicized, you know, Portuguese names that were anglicized. [She reads from the census.]

This is Peaked Hill Bar Station, Second District, Provincetown, U.S. Census 1930. Frank L. Mayo is the head. There is Joseph A. Morris. Now there are lots of Portuguese families with the name Morris in Provincetown. Manuel F. Silva. John F. Cook... the Cooks were Cooks because, that wasn't their real name, they took that name because the man who came here happened to be a cook on board the boat. Frank L. Sousa. This one I think is Maderos, Joseph Maderos. Oh, here's another Yankee, George Payne. Manuel Santos. Anthony R. Leonard – that's my grandfather. My grandfather at the time was twenty-four. Maurice Worth… and the Worths are Portuguese. Louie H. Silva. I think this Louie Silva would be my great-grandmother's stepfather.

So there were Portuguese men who made their living out here. Their families did come here. Their wives walked back and forth. This census was actually toward the end of their time out there.

A poem written by Harry Kemp conferred a special relationship between Theo and the shack. Traditions about Harry Kemp connected with her family traditions. On our hike, she brought the poem in her backpack, carried in a simple glassed picture frame, so it might be read in front of Harry Kemp's old shack:

Theo: When I was about a year old, Harry Kemp saw me in either my mother's or father's arms. I had blond curly hair. He was inspired to write this poem. He delivered it to Sal

Del Deo, who was a fellow artist and best friend of father's, to give to my mother and father. He signed it with a seagull feather. I had no idea that I would ever be spending so much time in the shack that he lived in, and probably wrote it in.

'Rondel of a Child's Wonder.' June 1950.

The delight of a child in a flower
Captured me in the street.
My heart went out to its power
To music soft and sweet.
It stayed my willing feet
As with a golden dower.
The delight of a child in a flower
Captured me in the street.
But the clouds of the future lower.
I saw the Paraclete of eternity take the hour
Where earth and heaven meet.
The delight of a child in a flower
Captured me in the street.

Signed with a seagull's feather,
Harry Kemp.

Wolfe: And this is the envelope it came in? It says,

"For Salvatore Del Deo, to be given to the young, holy family with the Provincetown Christ Child."

Wolfe: The "Christ Child" is you.
Susan: What a legacy!
Theo: *[Tears in her eyes]* I know. I've kept it all these years.

The traditions of the families of these four women are those of Old Provincetown. Because of their personal family histories, the traditions have come to be strongly linked to the dune shacks. Their visits to the shacks have become a continuation of those traditions. These final statements by the women, sitting in front of the Tasha shack, examined those connections:

Susan: Coming here is really our opportunity for renewal. I know Maureen mentioned, it's a very spiritual, religious experience, not in the classic, organized, religious sense. But it's a very spiritual, religious experience for us here. I can sit here and just totally stare into space and hours can go by and I have no ideas where I was. It is meditative in a very simple way. It's restorative.

Maureen: I remember once I came out one time with Debbie Shaw. We stayed a couple of nights here at the Tasha shack. We just took a little vow that we wouldn't speak for certain hours of the day. So we would leave a rock with a little message – 'I went for a walk,' 'I'll be back in an hour' – or whatever, but just no words, for a certain amount of the day. Who's to say what's artistic and what's a gift and what isn't? The photographs that we take here, the poems that we write here, that might not be our profession, but it's definitely creative to us. Not to judge what it holds for other people, but it's just as important to us. And it is our heritage, and it is our childhood, and it all wraps up. When

things are bothering you, you head to the dunes. When you celebrate, you head to the dunes. It's just a part of our lives. It's the backdrop. It's the most beautiful backdrop you could ever ask for. And it's ours.

Kathie: You'd be cutting off our creative arm to not allow us access to what we have come to rely on as our restorative, creative release and renewal place. It's just that important to us. We're that entrenched in this.

Theo: When you say celebrations, when my father hit his 70th birthday...

Susan: That was a great day.

Theo: My sisters and I were trying to think of what can we do that's really, really special. My father and stepmother have spent a great deal of time at various dune shacks over the years throughout their marriage. So we got the idea that we would hire Art's Dune Tours to take all their friends and family out, with lobsters. We did a big clambake. We brought everything with us that we could possibly need for a big celebration. Art's Dune Tours took us all out in several buggies and we surprised them with this huge birthday party with lobsters and corn on the cob and everything. It was an amazing thing. We're all in this hollow around this dune shack. It was an incredible experience. I don't think we could have picked anything better to do for his 70th birthday. They were so shocked. It was absolutely perfect.

Susan: God, there must have been thirty or forty people. It was the entire restaurant. We all worked for Theo's father at different points.

Maureen: And our children, too. It's just such a wonderful Provincetown connection. And what happens to all of those old artists, bohemian-type people, if we can't carry on this tradition? This is their tradition.

Susan: This gives people the opportunity to be different. It seems like there is such a push to conform at this point in history in this country. It seems like that's of utmost importance, to conform and accept everything as it's written or given to you through the media. This is one of those pieces that allows people to step back and say, "wait a minute, wait a minute."

Maureen: As the generations go on, we're so concerned with the children and grandchildren. You know, Jack and Sailor are Dad's great-grandchildren, Vavoo's great-great-grandchildren. My grandfather was a whaler off the Grand Banks and came to New Bedford through Ellis Island as a stowaway at eighteen. He couldn't speak the language, so they gave him the name of Joseph. So all of these things we want to preserve, that we talk about. Here's this very simplistic, easy way of saying it: "You know what kids? Come away from the computer for an afternoon and let Nana take you to a little enchanted place." That's what it's about. That's what it's all about. Naturally, hopefully, they'll grow up. They're already smarter than we are and everything else, but we have things that we can give too. And they're going to need that. More and more and more, we're going to need that.

Kathie: I wrote this little thing this week because I didn't have a picture that I could grab. My pictures were so messed up. It's a little poem about growing up here and being in the dunes. I call it "Dune Children."

'Dune Children'

It was our wilderness
Remote and rising
They lured us in
Were we grown enough in mind and body

To master the climb?

Beyond the highest, mightiest,
Wild adventures waited.
Young and supple legs carried our curious imagining
To places willed into creation

Each exploration new
To the pirates… poets… princesses…
Born on these days of youthful foraging
Bared feet led the way
Towards the richness of self-discovery"

Theo: See, you're an artist.
Maureen: You're a poet.
Kathie: No, I don't qualify.
Maureen: That was us. We used to be princesses out here.
Kathie: We were pirates, poets, princesses, born on these days of youthful foraging. We were whatever we wanted to be.

Chapter 8. Cultural Traditions II: The Edge of America's Art Colony

Many practices within dune shack society today may be traced to the American art and literary traditions centered at Provincetown and Truro. Dune shack society formed at the edge of the fine arts colony of the lower cape, a fringe population pushing out into the backshore, drawing creative inspiration from its stark natural energies and its mixes of solitude and sociability. Fine arts have been the second great tradition giving purpose and identity to dune shack society. Many dune dwellers shared an expressive culture with century-old roots at Provincetown, highly valuing creative expression through art and literature.

The exceptional composition of the contemporary dune shack society struck me during interviews. It contained a high density of artists and writers. The fine arts held a commanding presence on the dunes. I encountered artists and writers most everywhere I looked, even within dune shack families who forcefully insisted that dune shacks should never be restricted solely to artists. Many dune dwellers worked at art and literature with passionate commitment. For some it was their life's profession, for others a cherished avocation. With unanimity, all pointed to the dunes and the dune shacks as integral to creative inspiration. Many viewed their work to be an extension of the storied traditions of art and literature centered at Provincetown and Truro. For them, this living tradition grounded their personal identities as artists and writers. This chapter traces the connectedness of the contemporary dune shack families to the art traditions at Provincetown. It describes the art colony at Provincetown today, contrasting it with the colony at mid-century. Then it describes connections of particular shack families to these art traditions, ending with a detailed case example of how artistic traditions have been passed down within particular family lines centered in dune shacks.

Provincetown's Art Colony and Living Traditions

Provincetown artists I talked with commonly portrayed their town as the oldest fine arts colony in the United States. In previous chapters, Conrad Malicoat, Anne Lord, and Josephine Del Deo recounted its formation around several charismatic art teachers who drew students to summer art schools on the lower cape. Eugene O'Neill and other intellectuals congregated at Provincetown about the First World War, starting a tradition of writing. An efflorescence of art and literature bloomed, centered in Provincetown, but also in nearby Truro and Wellfleet. Murray Zimiles, a nephew of artists Boris Margo and Jan Gelb, bore witness to what may have been the height of the fine arts colony near mid-century. He grew up in Provincetown during summers, living at the Gelb-Margo shack and Margo's house in town, eventually becoming an established artist himself. In our interview, Zimiles described a vital art colony during the 1950s and 1960s, and contrasted those "old days" with the excessive commercialization that discouraged young artists today:

> In the old days, Provincetown was ground zero for the major artists in America, period. The Hamptons didn't hold a candle to Provincetown in terms of the big shots. It's always been a summer colony. Many people came from elsewhere. They didn't live there. 'Elsewhere' was mainly New York and maybe Boston, but for the art community, primarily New York.
>
> People used to joke in the old days that if they bombed Provincetown, Truro, and Wellfleet, you'd wipe out the entire cultural elite in America. There's some truth to that. Now you'd

have to add the Hamptons [on east Long Island, New York], and there's probably stuff in California. But especially in the 50s and 60s, Provincetown was the center of the universe.

There was a very famous school in Provincetown, the Hans Hofmann School. Actually there were a number of schools there, including Boris Margo's school, although it was not as well known as the Hans Hofmann School. Hans Hofmann [1880-1966] is considered one of the great art teachers in America. He was a German who came here. Many of his students became super-famous artists. Many of them studied in Provincetown under Hans Hofmann. Another school was the one run by Victor Candell [1903-1977] and Leo Manso [1914-1993], which became the Long Point Gallery. These schools taught a number of the artists. They became very influential as well. So through the schools and the community, the town's influence kept spreading. The tentacles go everywhere, right across America. There's no end to it. If somebody wanted to document this, it would be a real interesting study, how much of an influence that Provincetown was. And of course the dunes were a part of the town, being a major influence on the people who influenced other people. It would be enormous.

The Art Association was a common ground for a lot of people. We would all be in their exhibitions, which would be a big moment. Everybody would come in from the dunes. The whole town would show up, a big deal at the opening, hundreds of people, and parties. In the old days there was a symphony orchestra in Provincetown. A dance company in Provincetown. The Provincetown Playhouse. You could walk down the street and every other person was some famous something-or-the-other. Martha Graham [1894-1991]. Zoot Simms [1927-1985] and Larry Rivers [1923-], the famous jazz musician and painter. The next street, all the players for the Boston Symphony or New York Philharmonic. The next, some wacko people dancing on the street with the Provincetown Dance Company. Walking by houses, there'd be chamber music coming out. It's a bit like the Clinton years – did it ever happen? It did happen. I was a witness to it. It was magic, like magic.

Boris Margo used to share a studio with Mark Rothko [1903-1970], who was probably one of the most famous abstract impressionists, one of the most famous American painters. They shared a studio in New York for fifteen years. Mark Rothko's house [in Provincetown] was just a couple of houses down from the entrance to Atkins Mayo Road where Boris's house in town is. Rothko would be a frequent visitor. So one of the most famous painters in America had a house in Provincetown. I could list all these different artists. Many of them would come out to the dunes because Boris was there, you know, because he was a "wild man" in many ways. Boris was the least materialistic person I've ever met. He'd give to everybody. "What's in your refrigerator?" they'd ask. "Here, it's all yours. Here, have a drink. Have this. Have that." So people had a good time.

There was a major, major influence on the New York art scene, especially through the schools and the interaction of painters. They'd show their works in the galleries, and the collectors would enter. Of course Provincetown was a major collector's community as well. In the old days, I remember I was a busboy, my first job in town, at Seascape House and Inn, a sophisticated place. You had to have references to go there. The Rolls Royces would be parked there, literally. The collectors would come out. They'd walk uptown. They'd probably drop maybe ten thousand dollars, which is the equivalent of a hundred thousand now. They'd spend a week there, sort of meet the artists, get in their Rolls and go back where they came from. That wasn't one or two collectors, that was many. A lot of artists almost made a living by selling their work during the summer. They were able to maintain themselves over the winter. It was a very different world in those days.

> A lot of this has changed. The writer's colony at Wellfleet and Truro has even grown. It's still one of the most important writer's colonies in America. The art community has diminished. However, the Fine Arts Work Center for the young artist has become a major player nationally. They've produced a lot of famous artists. So that goes on. But the density that was there at one time is no longer there. The makeup of the town is very different. It's very commercial now. It's very gay. So that's discouraged some of the younger artists in some ways. It's not about prejudice. It's about balance, or something like that. Artists are sort of libertarians. They could care less: leave me alone I'll leave you alone. They would accept everything, in fact, encourage everything. That's the nature of being an artist: just "do your thing" so to speak. But it's become a very different kind of a town, the high real estate values and the fact that it's so commercial now. In the old days there were always trinket shops, but you had two of them. Now there are like two hundred of them. You know, it's a bore. There were always quite a few galleries. But this many today! I don't want to insult anyone, but what you're looking at there is about eighty percent of them are garbage and about twenty percent of them have art in them. Just because they sell pictures doesn't mean that they're art. There are still three or four good galleries in Provincetown now. There were many more really good galleries in the old days, though not a lot more.

In his recollections, Zimiles observed a vibrant summer colony at Provincetown during the 1950s and 1960s, attracting accomplished members of the fine arts, particularly the visual arts and writing, but also performing artists in music and theatre. Major elements of the colony included the artists, the art schools, the art association, the good galleries, and the serious art collectors. Members of the art colony commonly had homes in the urban centers of the northeast (such as New York and Boston) as well as Provincetown. There was an interaction between big city and town and dunes that stimulated creativity, with influences spreading out like "tentacles," "right across America." These traditions continued today, according to Zimiles, but at lower densities. He observed that the visual arts had diminished due to rampant commercialism and high real estate costs, while creative writing perhaps had grown in Provincetown and Truro.

The current public face of Provincetown's art colony may be represented by a recent edition of *Provincetown Arts* (2004/05), an art guide published annually by Provincetown Arts Press, a non-profit press for artists and poets. Like Zimiles, its introductory editorial heralded the town's standing as "the nation's oldest continuous art colony," but with an emphasis placed on "continuous," demonstrated by the creative new work featured in its magazine:

> Published annually in mid-summer since 1985, *Provincetown Arts* focuses broadly on artists, performers, and writers who inhabit or visit the tip of Cape Cod, and seeks to stimulate creative activity and enhance public awareness of the cultural life of the nation's oldest continuous art colony. Drawing upon a century-long tradition rich in art, theater, and writing, *Provincetown Arts* publishes essays, fiction, interviews, journals, performance pieces, poetry, profiles, reporting, reviews, and visual features, with a view toward demonstrating that a community of artists, functioning outside the urban centers, is a utopian dream with an ongoing vitality. (*Provincetown Arts* 2004: 33)

In this portrayal, today's art colony is said to continue the town's "century-long tradition," including visual arts, literature, and theater, "a utopian dream with an ongoing vitality."

The titled sections of the art guide provide a feel for the shape of contemporary fine arts at Provincetown. The issue provides twenty-one profiles of *Provincetown Painters*, ten features on

Authors, four essays on *Theater*, two pieces of *Fiction*, and selections from ten poets under *Poetry*. So "Provincetown arts" encompassed primarily the visual arts and literature (including poetry), with some theater, but no music. The featured artist in the issue was Paul Resika, a contemporary local painter and former student of Hans Hofmann. Featured artists, performers, and writers in past editions have included Norman Mailer, Robert Motherwell, Annie Dillard, Joel Meyerowitz, Stanley Kunitz, Mark Doty, Mary Oliver, Karen Finley, John Waters, Eileen Myles, Sebastian Junger, and Hayden Herrera (2004/05:160). In the most recent issue, articles covered two historic figures, Eugene O'Neill and Henry Thoreau, writers associated with Provincetown's past and the backshore dunes.

The art guide advertised programs of three major associations and schools in the Provincetown area: the Provincetown Art Association and Museum; the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown; and the Castle Hill Truro Center for the Arts. All three organizations operated from prominent buildings in Provincetown or Truro. Many dune shack residents have been active in these entities over the years, such as Philip Malicoat helping to start the Fine Arts Work Center, and Joyce Johnson founding the Castle Hill Truro Center for the Arts. In addition to the big three, four other art institutions also advertised programs in the art guide – the Cape Museum of Fine Arts in Dennis (a town further up the cape), the Massachusetts Cultural Council (a state entity), Campus Provincetown (a school offering classes through a consortium of local art groups and teachers), and Wilks University (a school in Pennsylvania offering creative writing classes two hours west of New York City). Two non-local societies advertised programs in 2004/05. The Eugene O'Neill Society announced its Sixth International Conference in Provincetown in June 2005, the town being the location of O'Neill's early plays, many written on the dunes. Similarly, the Norman Mailer Society announced its Second Annual Conference at Provincetown in November 2004, the town being a home for Mailer. Like O'Neill, Mailer also has written from dune shacks. Two theaters advertised performances of plays and music during the 2004/05 season – the Provincetown Repertory Theatre in Provincetown and the Payomet Theatre in North Truro.

The art guide also presented a window to the commercial side of the Provincetown art colony. A substantial portion of the issue consisted of advertisements of art merchants. There were paid advertisements for thirty-three art galleries, of which twenty-two were located in Provincetown, five in Wellfleet, and one each in Barnstable, Boston, Brewster, Hyannis, New York, and Truro. The many gallery ads suggest that Provincetown currently functions as a market center for works of art during summer. With the gallery ads, there were paid advertisements for three individual artists, three architectural firms, and three design studios. In addition, the issue provided guides to substantial numbers of commercial establishments catering to summer visitors, including a *Dining Guide*, a *Lodging Guide*, and a *Wedding Guide* (in anticipation of legal gay weddings in Massachusetts that year). By these indicators, merchants used the reputation of the Provincetown art colony for marketing artwork and services to summer visitors.

This picture of the contemporary organization of the Provincetown art colony is consistent with that of Murray Zimiles. Visual artists and writers formed the core of today's art colony, currently with three main associations and schools at Provincetown and Truro. A substantial number of galleries, generally operated by merchants, sold works of art, most of the galleries located along Commercial Street near the center of town. And a host of secondary commercial establishments like restaurants and lodges (as well as "trinket shops") serviced the summer crowds of tourists drawn to Provincetown at the tip of Cape Cod.

Fine Art Traditions in Contemporary Dune Shack Society

The dune shacks became an extension of the fine art colony onto the backshore through individual artists and families, rather than through the activities of organizations like art schools or art associations. None of the organized fine art institutions has ever owned or cared for a dune shack. Individual shack users commonly have been involved in these organizations, but organizational activities are only on occasion formally connected to the dunes (such as the Malicoats' annual hosting of fellows from the Fine Arts Work Center at their shack). As shown in previous chapters, dune shack society always has been structured first by kinship (extended families) and secondarily by friendship (networks of friends linked to extended families). These have been the traditional forms of social organization. The relatively recent involvement with dune shacks by two non-profit organizations (Peaked Hill Trust and Provincetown Community Compact) emerged in response to Seashore activities, initially in the struggle to prevent shack demolition during the 1980s, and later in bids to satisfy Seashore requests for artist-in-residence programs. So it has been through individuals, not organizations, that the Provincetown art colony has reached out onto the backshore.

Not every shack has been connected with the fine arts colony. This was illustrated by the list of some prominent non-artistic dune residents by Josephine and Salvatore Del Deo in Chapter 2. I observed no direct connection with the fine arts colony by current users of the Dunn shack. However, other than this one, I observed that all other shacks currently were homes to artists, writers, or performers of one sort or another.

I did not ask for comprehensive lists of artists, writers, or performers when I conducted interviews. Even so, fine arts entered the interviews, a pervasive aspect in the lives of many shack residents. A partial list illustrates this prevalent cultural theme. Peter Clemons (Clemons-Benson and Fowler shacks) ran an art gallery in Provincetown displaying his own dune paintings (gouache watercolors) and those of David Thompson, an associate. Both of them were using the Clemons-Benson shack to paint in 2004. Peter Clemons was a graphic artist by profession, and of his children, Thomas John was an artist and David Andrew was a novice screenwriter. Andrea Champlin (Champlin shack) and her husband were both professional painters who displayed their abstracts at their New York City gallery. She said she did not sell her impressionist pieces of the dunes; they were personal works displayed at the Champlin shack. Paul, her brother, painted birds, and Nathaniel, her father, taught photography and art at Cranbook Art Academy in Michigan. David Adams (Adams shack) painted watercolors, particularly wildflower subjects, currently selling as note cards (called "Nature Notes") at the Province Land Visitor Center.

Salvatore Del Deo (Schnell-Del Deo shack) worked as an established professonal artist, with examples of his oils displayed at the Provincetown Town Hall. Josephine Del Deo was a writer, with many of her works (plays, a novel, several anthologies, poetry, small tracts and articles and a biography of Ross Moffett, the painter) written at the Schnell-Del Deo shack. Their son, Romolo, was a sculptor and their daughter, Giovanna, was a writer. Jay Critchley (C-Scape shack) was a conceptual artist, his works commonly expressing political commentary on environmental and social issues, as described in Chapter 9. Emily Beebe (Beebe-Simon shack) was writing a book called *Washed Ashore* about life on the lower cape. Joyce Johnson (various shacks and Peaked Hill Trust) was an artist, writer, and founder of the Castle Hill Truro Center for the Arts. Zara and Samuel Jackson painted on the dunes as avocations, taking art classes at Provincetown and Truro "when they could afford it," she said. Ray Wells (Wells shack) worked professionally in the film industry. Paul Tasha (Tasha shack) was a sculptor of small cast bronzes of naturalistic subjects, some combining human and animal forms. Lawrence Schuster (Schuster shack) performed as a classical pianist, playing his shack's newly-acquired digital piano powered from

solar panels. Janet Armstrong (Armstrong shack) crafted and sold jewelry as a living in the Boston area. Conrad Malicoat (Malicoat shack) operated a studio in Provincetown from which he sculpted, painted, and crafted elaborate fireplaces with brick. While not a complete list, these examples illustrate the prevalence of artistic activities among current dune shack residents. In addition, the shacks under the care of the two non-profits housed artist-in-residence programs and programmed residencies of people selected randomly. Many applicants have been artists or writers, as described in Chapter 10. A collection of writing and art from the dunes was compiled by Peaked Hill Trust as examples of the creative output of dune dwellers (*From the Peaked Hills: A Collection of Writing and Drawing*, Candice Reffe (ed), Shank Painter Printing Company, Provincetown, MA, published in association with the Peaked Hill Trust, 1988).

According to dune shack residents I asked, no single genre, technique, or literature is specifically identifiable with the dunes. Works are varied and progressive, evolving with American art and literature. But most residents credited living within the dune environment as an influence on their work. Immersion in the dunes, living close to nature in the shacks, in the bright light and fluid environment, brought inspiration. Conrad Malicoat and Anne Lord cautioned about "pigeonholing" the artistic and literary traditions that have found expression by dune dwellers, and described the dunes' effects on people:

Malicoat: I would be somewhat careful about pigeonholing it too much. I think a lot of people are inspired by the landscape. Certainly my dad was. But some artists would take a lot of license in how they would interpret that. The landscape and the water and everything that's going on out there is the inspiration. Now how that turns out through one's mind, it can be interpreted in a lot of different ways.

Lord: Also in writing, not just in the visual arts. I would agree with Conrad, you can't really say it's a certain way. I would not pigeonhole it into any particular genre. Maybe at certain points of history there's a certain kind of painting that shows up more, but I would be loath to try to categorize it like that. I think it affects many people in many different ways, some people more abstractly and some people literally. And the people who go spend time out there, whatever their walk of life is, not the arts necessarily, they gain a tremendous amount of the same thing. They should be honored as much as known artists or writers. Richard Busch composed this whole piece called "The Dunes of Music," a composition specifically for the Art Association on their 75th anniversary. The inspiration was the dunes.

Malicoat: I can tell you, frankly I'm not a poet. I don't think of myself as a poet. But I've walked down that beach and all of a sudden all of these poetic words will come out:

> Into a cave of a wave
> She went walking,
> She stood talking to herself
> Of the collapse of all roofs,
> The hooves in the L'ascaux crashing,
> Dissolving in sand.

It's that sort of thing. I don't know where it came from, but it just came out. When you walk down to that beach and you're all by yourself, you don't have to be by yourself, but especially if you're all by yourself, there's some powerful, powerful kind of stuff that gets churned up. But what is it, exactly? I mean, you can talk about the water churning into "a cave of a wave," but what you're talking about is change. Everything changes. Nothing stays the same. The liquid aspect of it all is very profound.

Fine Art Traditions and Multigenerational Families

As shown above, the transmission of fine art traditions occurs within art colonies like Provincetown's, congregations of artists and writers coalescing around charismatic teachers, writers, schools, associations, and galleries. In Chapter 2, Conrad Malicoat characterized one archetypal path for burgeoning artists – the artist as family misfit. In this archetype, a troubled family member pursues art instead of more ordinary, practical careers. Family dissonance compels the troubled aspirant to leave (or be cast from) home. Such artists are described as responding to intensely personal drives to create and to express, impulses that push them to seek out likeminded associates at art colonies. Julian Esmeralda, the young, homosexual artist who is the lead character in R.D. Skillings' book, *How Many Die,* exemplifies this archetype, driven to Provincetown by internal demons where he's accepted in the gay community of the art colony, a local group that embraces, nurtures, and eventually buries him.

But Conrad Malicoat charted another archetypal path for artists, one that pertained to him personally – the artist as family tradition bearer. In this archetype, a child grows up in family of artists extending across several generations. The child is immersed in creative pursuits as if this were simply the normal course of affairs. The child learns and practices fine arts within a family, following an established family tradition. In such family lines, art is elevated to a highly valued pursuit, praised and encouraged. Children come to experience art through other family members at early ages and given formal education at art schools or through apprenticeships. Such children may strongly identify with their family's traditions, seeing their efforts as the newest generation to continue a way of life directed toward artistic expression.

The dune shacks have been strongly linked to this second type of tradition, art culture passed across generations within particular family lines. Several dune shacks have been, and continue to be, focal points for multigenerational families practicing creative arts as family traditions. Currently, shacks that have been centers for the cultural transmission of art along family lines include the Malicoat shack, Gelb-Margo-Zimiles shack, the Champlin shack, the Malkin-Ofsevit-Jackson shack, the Schnell-Del Deo shack, and the Clemons-Benson shack.

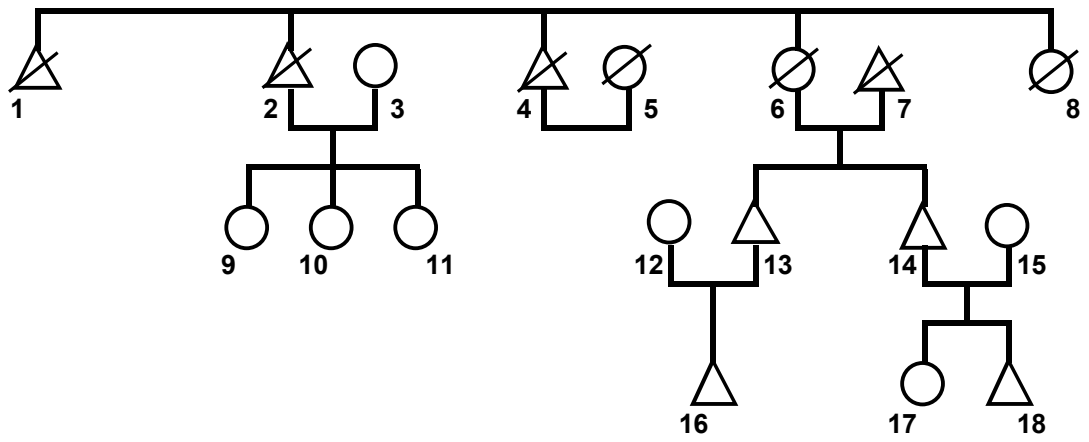
The Gelb-Margo-Zimiles shack clearly illustrates a family line of tradition bearers centered at a dune shack. Murray Zimiles and Dawn Zimiles, interviewed in this study, were artists following in the footsteps of a storied line of artists. In this Jewish family, art has been a valued tradition traced back several generations to Europe, pushed over from Russia to America by the horrors of World War II, and flourishing in the New York-Provincetown area through the 20th century to the present. In this case, the family line found a center at the Gelb-Margo-Zimiles shack. The shack has been a creative center for three generations. According to Murray Zimiles, the dunes and the shack became the "sacred ground, the holy ground" for the family, a touchstone for creativity, a place for renewal and energy. The dunes and the shack served as a gathering point for family artists, and a final resting place for the ashes of family members. As described below, the traditional patterns of use continue in this vein today, although the future transmission of this cultural pattern was uncertain given the uncertain status of their family's dune shack. The story of this cultural tradition at the dune shack, transmitted within a family line, and the potential break in those traditions depending on the disposition of the family's shack, was recounted by the Zimiles in our interviews.

I interviewed Murray Zimiles and his wife, Martha Rogers Zimiles, at their rural home in upstate New York, a multistory, quasi-cubist structure designed and built by the Zimiles and filled with art, much of it created by family members. In addition to his work as a visual artist, Murray Zimiles held the Kempner Distinguished Professor of Art at the State University of New

York at Purchase. I interviewed Murray's niece, Dawn Zimiles, in Provincetown. There she lived and painted at the house of her great uncle, Boris Margo, now co-owned by members of the extended family. Each described their experiences growing up in a family of artists. Murray Zimiles is the nephew of Boris Margo and Jan Gelb, raised by them during summers at the dune shack outside Provincetown. Dawn Zimiles is the grand niece of Boris Margo and Jan Gelb. Murray and Dawn Zimiles graciously permitted the use of family photographs to illustrate the historic use of the Gelb-Margo-Zimiles shack.

The people in this story can be placed in the accompanying family tree depicting the last three generations of the Margolis-Zimiles line. In this family tree there are five siblings and three spouses in the top generation, five cousins with two spouses in the next generation, and three more family members in the third. All have used the dune shack, except Haika Margolis. Boris Margo and Jan Gelb, who painted from dune shacks for several decades, are numbered 4 and 5. Murray Zimiles, who helped build the current shack, and who has been a dune dweller since a child, is numbered 13. Dawn Zimiles, who used the shack growing up, is numbered 17. Other family members are similarly placed and numbered. The description of the family's artistic traditions and uses of the shack are recounted first by Murray Zimiles (the second generation), and then by Dawn Zimiles (the third generation), and again by Murray and Martha Zimiles. The story is recounted in their own words, illustrated with selected family photographs.

People in the Margolis - Zimiles Family Line



1. Dov Margolis
2. Dave Margolis
3. Ruth Margolis
4. Boris Margo
5. Jan Gelb
6. Yevgenia Margolis
7. Joe Zimiles
8. Haika Margolis
9. Yevgenia Margolis
10. Adrien Margolis
11. Helene Margolis
12. Martha Rogers Zimiles
13. Murray Zimiles
14. Stanley Zimiles
15. Ruth Zimiles
16. Andre Zimiles
17. Dawn Zimiles
18. Seth Zimiles

Murray Zimiles (Second Generation) and the Margolis-Zimiles Family

"Boris Margo is my uncle, my mother's brother. Boris's mother lived in Russia. They weren't exactly peasants, because they were educated. But they lived in a mud house in the old country, that is, the floor was hard clay mud. Boris' mother would decorate the floor. She'd paint designs on it. In the old country, decorative art was very important.

"Boris's older brother, Dov, is an interesting story, quite fascinating. Dov was the first one to come, to leave Russia because he was the oldest. He went to Palestine to become a settler there, caught malaria and almost died. He could not earn a living, very sick, emaciated, and thought he couldn't make it there. So he came to America. What he did for a living was decorate people's apartments on Park Avenue with faux marble and faux wood. He made enough money to send it to the old country to start bringing out family members. But Boris did not get out that way. For Boris' thesis at Leningrad Academy, one of the things they allowed you to do was to go abroad to copy a master work. So Boris persuaded them that he was going to the Louvre in Paris to copy a major painting for his thesis, and he never came back. He just left. He came to America via Cuba. He got out on his own. But David and my mother and Haika, another sister, these people got out because Dov was sending money.

"When Dov was in America, and Boris was in America, and the rest of the family finally came to America, Dov one day said, 'Look, you're all healthy. You've got jobs. You all can survive. I'm going back to Palestine.' David at that time was working as a soda jerk in a candy store. Boris was teaching at the Roerich Museum, then a prominent and interesting place. Dov went back to Palestine and became a mounted policeman for the British and bought orange groves. Dov was artistic in this sense. In Palestine he became one of the best developers of housing in Israel because he had aesthetic taste. There was so little money then, they were basically building like the Soviets, concrete things that were falling apart before they were finished. But Dov built the first quality housing in the State of Israel. They were aesthetically attractive because of his aesthetic training.

"David became a major textile designer and a prominent sculptor and a muralist with Diego Rivera [1886-1957]. He was Louise Nevelson's lover. Nevelson [1899-1988] was one of America's most important female sculptors. She described him as 'the gorgeous Russian.' It's a very colorful family. I could tell you many stories. David became very prominent working with Diego Rivera. Boris of course became a major artist in New York. He was eclipsed by some of his best friends and colleagues eventually in fame. But he had an exhibition with Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery, Jimmy Ernst's gallery – at that time these were the major galleries in New York. He showed at the Betty Parsons Gallery for 28 years, one of the key galleries in New York City. He's in most major collections. The Fogg just two weeks ago bought one of the pieces from Provincetown. The Whitney just got 85 of his pieces. This keeps going and going.

"When I was three years old my mother died of cancer. Rather than have us go to an orphanage, which was discussed, Boris decided to at least cover the period of summers for my brother and I. So 1944 was my first visit to the dunes of Provincetown. I was three years old. From that moment on, every single year, to this year, I've been going to Provincetown. We've seen many, many shacks. This is like, I think – I'll have to figure this out – the third one that he built, but he also stayed in the old Coast Guard Station shacks, the station that was on the high ridge, not the one that's in ruins now. The one that's in ruins had a little boathouse. We stayed in the boathouse for a couple of years too. So it wasn't always on that piece of property. But we finally got to that current piece of property. I think this present shack dates to 1973, if I remember

correctly. I was in my early thirties then, and I helped build that shack. I remember it vividly. In fact, my footprint is still on one of the boards in the roof. That is my connection: literally, every summer of my life, and just about every single summer since we've been married, and almost every summer of my son's life until recently when he's left the household to live in New York.

"Jan and Boris never had children. We were their kids, essentially, my brother and I. In many ways, the shack was more Jan's than Boris'. My connection is to both of them, of course. But Jan, even when Boris had his house in town, they would live apart. She would always live in the shack. She would come in with her white gloves and tell Boris how dirty his place was. *[Laughter.]* Then after she made sure he got the message, she'd go back out to the dunes to her pristine shack. Jan did artwork out there. Both of them did.

"Some people could argue that Boris' most significant work was done there. I showed you some of those monoprints. For example, one of them was just bought by the Fogg Museum in Harvard just last week, one done on the dunes. If you look at them pictorially, the influences of the driftwood are very apparent in those early works. He did this huge series in 1940. He painted there until he got his house in town. For 25 to 30 years he painted on the dunes. There are wonderful photographs of him, some by very famous photographers, of him on the dunes with his paintings. Some of them are very famous photographs, as a matter of fact. In his later paintings, it was this sort of streaking of the sky at sunset that created many of those images. So the dunes had an impact, even though not a literal depiction of the dunes in his paintings, but it was always a residual visual impact of the dunes on his work. Extremely important. In fact, he couldn't have made it without the dunes.

"The same was true with Jan Gelb [1906-1978]. Absolutely. She painted there until her dying day practically. Boris then created that monument for her in front of the Art Association with her poem, to this day one of the most powerful statements about the dunes ever written. For me, it's very emotional. I'll cry for you. Jan is interesting. She was one of the first female graduates of Yale art school. But she was always under the influence of Boris. Maybe that's not a nice thing to say. She admired him because Boris was a true artist. It's hard to explain what that means, because most artists today are part businessman. He was only an artist. That may have been his own undoing in terms of his fame quotient. He was a true artist.

"Boris was an immense influence on me. For instance, this house we are in now I literally built. That never could have happened without Boris. Boris gave me the courage to try anything. His house in Provincetown is a disaster in terms of construction. He had never built a house. But he'd walk down the block where there were houses going up and he'd say, 'Oh, that's how you do it.' And he'd start hammering away. But I wonder if his house is going to survive if there were a hurricane. He gave me the courage to build houses. He gave me courage. He gave me a certain kind of artistic education. Originally I was studying engineering. When I needed to gain proficiency, taking all these art courses, I didn't have money to spend much more time at the university, so I studied with him. It was a revelation. I love him so much on so many levels. So now I'm a distinguished professor at a university, about to become an extinguished professor.

"My son is also very artistic, except his bent is toward web design. He's a graphic designer rather than the so-called 'fine arts.' And my niece and nephew too. Dawn is a graphic designer, a Web designer as well. Her brother is a sculptor. Of David's children, Yevgenia was a dancer and Adrien was a painter, an artist. Helene is sort of the black sheep. She's become a major environmental figure in the State of California. As I say, it's a colorful family. And the tradition lives on. It's that connection. Boris was like the pivot of that whole world, and the shack and Provincetown itself was the center of the universe for us in terms of that. For me, I went there

every single year of my life. My brother and I would live with them. When we were living at the coast guard station there was a little annex to it, like a two-room shack. Then for years we lived in a one-room shack, all four of us. Eventually, Boris built a place in Provincetown, in the town itself, so I was staying mostly there, as well as commuting back and forth into the dunes with Jan. By that time I was working, to earn my keep in college. I put myself through college living with Boris in Provincetown, working as a waiter, houseboy, that kind of stuff.

"Other family members also would come every year. David would come, and his kids would come, although they didn't live there, obviously. With four people it was hard enough. Imagine having eight people in that room. You'd have to sleep standing up. But it was a focal point. It was the place everyone talked about. They wouldn't talk about his apartment in New York. No one would care. It didn't matter where everyone else lived. The shack was where people really lived in terms of conversation, in terms of what happened, or where we were going. It was always, 'When are we going to Provincetown? When are we going to get there?' That kind of thing. It became a spiritual home. As I said, it's sacred ground. You know, their ashes are out there. All their ashes are out there. Mine will be too, I guess.

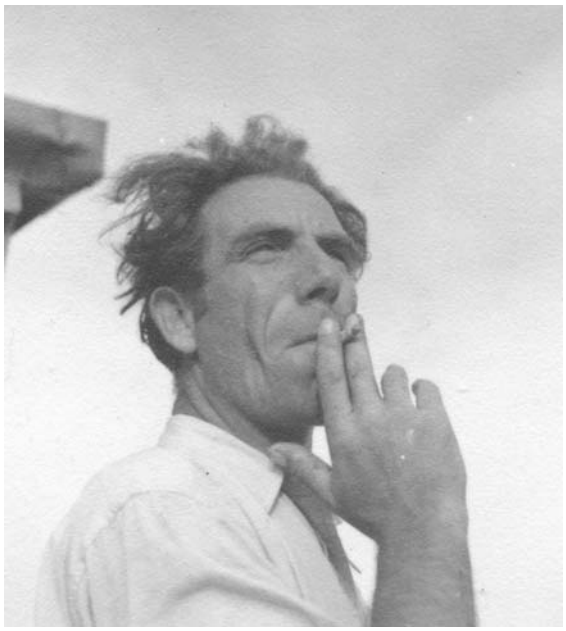
"My art is imaginary landscapes. Paintings. Drawings. Prints. Many different art forms. Whenever I go out there, I watch. For some reason the sunsets are very important to me. I take notes all the time, you know, do little sketches. They're not finished products, because I'm not interested in replicating. You know, there are a lot of dune painters. You go into Provincetown and every gallery has little pictures of the dunes. I'm not interested in that kind of art. My art, although it's imagistic in the sense that it's landscape bound, it's much more imaginative. But for sure, the dune landscape has influenced me. It's influenced me with color, it's influenced me through light especially, through texture, through many, many interactions with that environment. And also it's a place to think, and to read. It's not only about making. It's about preparing to make. There's no more solemn, wonderful place than to sit on one of those dunes and think it out. You know, people want proof: 'does he paint little dunes?' The answer is, 'No, he doesn't paint little dunes, but he couldn't paint anything he's painting without the process that precedes painting.' If there's ever a place on earth where you can do that, it's there.

"Boris couldn't have made what he did without being there. It would have been impossible. From those sort-of streaky light pictures to all those abstractions of all that found driftwood to just the structure of his pictures, what it is there. My nephew, Seth, took care of Boris during his last years in Provincetown. Even though Boris was a little 'out-to-lunch' then, because he'd sort of tune in and out of reality sometimes, he was still the greatest influence on my nephew's life, as crazy as he was, as weird as he was. I think it's kind of like a primal energy. It sounds like some hocus pocus, but it isn't. He gave Seth a kind of artistic faith in a way, the meaning and importance of being an artist, what it means truly to be an artist, not one of these artists who's a businessman, but an artist's artist, where art takes over your life, becomes your life, and becomes profoundly meaningful as a way of life. That's what he was able to do. And that's what he did for me too. That's an incredible gift."

Dawn Zimiles (Third Generation) and the Margolis-Zimiles Family Line

"My entire family has been inspired [by the dunes] in their artwork. If I were to mention who in my family were artists, I've heard it goes back five generations to Russia where people were building wooden synagogues. You can ask my uncle Murray [Zimiles]. He knows everything about that."

Boris Margo



"My great uncle Boris was a wonderful artist. He was one of the original surrealists, and he evolved certain new techniques. He was definitely a major figure in art. Boris's real name was Baruch Margolis. He came from Russia completely poverty stricken. He was in some sort of Jewish ghetto in Russia. He came out to New York, and his wife, Jan Gelb, brought him to Provincetown.

"My uncle Boris did a lot of work with sand, because he was on the dunes. He stretched canvas over wooden structures, furniture, stands, the table we just ate on. Then he put some kind of glue on it and sand on this. He also did a crazy kind of writing where he made a viscous liquid, wrote with it, and put sand on it. As you can see, there are all these sand creations everywhere [in the house]. This chair over here combines both the writing and sand. It's really a beautiful chair. You can see it says, 'Peace.' And hidden words. If you're in the right state of mind you can actually read this. I remember one day I saw that it said, 'Existence is beyond' and started to read it. I thought I was insane. But other people have told me they can read it too at times. There's so much of this stuff. My father has tons. And my uncle Murray's house too."

Top Right. Boris Margo at the dune shack, 1940s. Bottom Right. Boris Margo, "Matrix of an Unborn World," 1939, oil on canvas, 30 x 36.

Dave Margolis

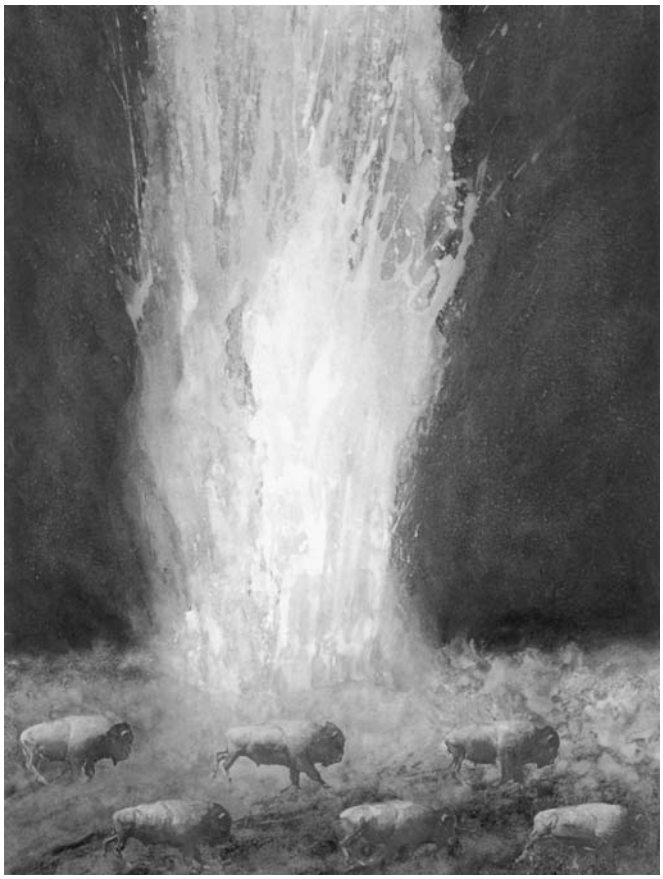
"My great uncle Dave just died very recently. He was a major figure as well. He was a muralist. He painted initially in the style of Diego Rivera, who he knew. My uncle Dave painted the murals at Bellvue Hospital. They were then painted over because there were black people and Native American people [in the murals]. They decided that it was communist. During the McCarthy years they completely covered them. He did a lot of metalwork, wonderful stuff. They're enormous metal, aluminum sculptures, crafted in this beautiful way so the objects revolve. And there was a lot of calligraphy. And he did paintings. He died just recently, but he painted up to the end of his life. He also was lecturing at New York University at that time. He died at ninety-two, the same age as Boris.

"He was so encouraging to me when I was younger, when I was studying art. He lived at LaGuardia Place, in that area of the Village. He had me come over there and he'd give me little tips on how to draw bone, because I was doing life drawings, how to make them come through the skin. He'd give me things to trace. He once told me things like, 'Make sure you have a library, make sure you have a visual library. You don't need to have a million books on one artist, but make sure you have some reference.' So to this day I always follow that [gesturing to a wall of books in her studio]. I'm always into my books. Dave Margolis, he's really a great artist."

Top Right. David Margolis, 1940s. Bottom Right. David Margolis mural.

Murray Zimiles

"My uncle, Murray Zimiles, is a wonderful artist too. He does painting and print, mostly printmaking, and sculpture. Most of my family dabbles. Almost everyone including myself experiments with many techniques. It's pretty unusual in artists. In fact, my uncle Murray is even getting into doing a little digital stuff. He refers to himself as the 'Old Man of the Dunes.' I'm thinking, 'Gosh, you're pretty young for an old man.' He's sixty-one or two, the same generation as my father.



"My uncle Murray is a pretty amazing artist. He goes through a lot of different periods. He was painting the Holocaust for a long time. Images. He went all over Poland researching that. He had a show at the Cape Museum not long ago, just really unbelievably strong paintings because of subject matter, but also because how he paints is very beautiful. He then went into painting these fire paintings, synagogues that were burnt down. He's done a lot with history. He was rendering figures when people were doing more modernistic stuff. He was doing his own trip, not going along with the culture at the time, what was popular art-wise. Now he does paintings that feature marching animals. Some of these paintings are really wild, animals marching in landscapes. You know, he built the shack. He's very involved with that for I guess 60 years, many, many years. Still, every single summer, he comes out with his wife, and my cousin sometimes. He was just here in July. To him it's like a pilgrimage. He absolutely has to come."

Top Right. Boris Margo and Murray Zimiles, 1990s. Bottom Right. Murray Zimiles, "Yellowstone, Old Faithful, 2000," mixed media on canvas, 50 x 38.

Jan Gelb

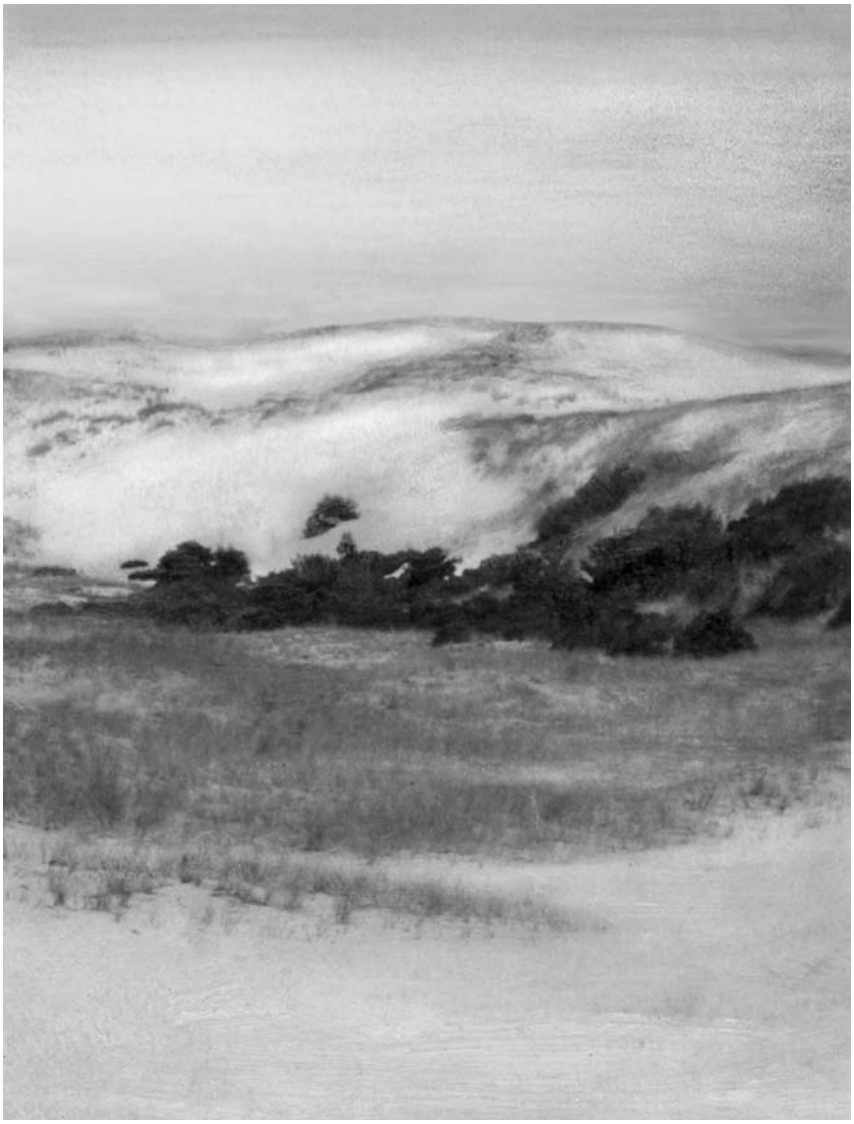
"My aunt, my great aunt Jan, was a wonderful artist. I have so many things I could show you. She was a wonderful painter and print maker. She wrote books and illustrated them too. She did one with fish that is just beautiful. My aunt Jan actually lived out there [at the dune shack]. She spent the whole summer, months on end painting out there. *[She shows examples of paintings.]* This is some of her work. These are hers too, up here, from the 30s or 40s. I mean, I have a lot of things, but these are actually of a dune scene that she painted. She would do little drawings of them. Here's more of her work. Oh, she's a wonderful, wonderful artist.

"I mean, I can't tell you how I feel that with my family, the work that my family does, I feel that no matter what I'm doing, I'm always like, 'Oh! I can never get to this point until maybe when I'm eighty years or something!' They are so good."

Top Right. Jan Gelb on the dunes, 1966.
Bottom. Jan Gelb, oil, 1947.

Dawn Zimiles

"I'm not sure what I am doing exactly [in my current work], but I'm trying to get a feeling, one I can only describe as capturing the energy of a place in a way that I feel is very beautiful. It's somehow where a painting and photography meets. Some people say, 'Oh, is this really a photograph?' It's kind of right on the border. It's some kind of middle ground. It's very experimental. I print out many photos and soak them in different materials. I use vellum, try different types of pigments. The original photos look quite different before being soaked. Then they are rephotographed and rescanned. I go through a long process until I get to what I call, 'the look.' I don't know really how to describe it. I mount them some of the time on masonite with archival glue. Then I continue to paint on them. This is the dunes area. Actually, this is where Boris' shack is, right up here. But I don't paint it in, because I don't feel like I want to yet, at this moment."



Top Right. Dawn Zimiles, 2000

Bottom Right. Dawn Zimiles, "Untitled," 2005

Seth Zimiles
"My brother, he's a sculptor. He's a really wonderful sculptor. He does metalwork, and he just started working for a foundry. Before he was working at the Beacon Museum. He does great stuff. He has the same values like me, where he wants to devote his life to something that he feels, that the moment you are doing it, you get the reward. You're not just doing it because you're working to save money for some other time."

Adrien Margolis
"My cousin Dave's three daughters are all very creative. Adrien is an artist, she studied art. She went to art school, Penn State I think. I haven't been in touch with her for a number of years. Last I heard she's still holding gallery exhibits at her apartment on Ninth Street that my family has had for many, many years. They've lived there since the 30s and 40s. They've made this little studio apartment. Of her art that I've seen, she went through a phase where she was painting bananas all the time, then dead mice. So she's done some really unique things. She found these mice that had been trapped, bananas, and stuff like that. I feel I'm not giving her a good description because I haven't seen her work in a while."

Yevgenia Margolis
"My cousin Genya, I have her books that she wrote, beautiful little children's books, really beautiful. She was a ballerina in the New York Ballet. Later she moved to Venice for many years. Then she lived in Yugoslavia during the whole conflict there. She had some type of dance company when she lived there. She's very interesting, my cousin Genie. She wrote these interesting books, like how color came into the world. And she illustrated them."

Helene Margolis
"Helene, she is not, you know, not really a visual artist. But she's very involved in environmental issues. She's a toxicologist in California."

Andre Zimiles
Andre does computer graphics. He builds websites, that kind of work. He went to Purchase, an art school. My uncle teaches there. But he's more focused in the whole digital realm. What's interesting is that my uncle Dave, Boris's brother, at the end of his life was very involved with computers as well. And I am too."

Ruth Zimiles
"My mother and my father had their honeymoon here [at the shack] in 1961. And in the summer of 1968 she stayed in this house with Boris. My mother said there was the energy of the dunes and Provincetown. She was a teacher in Rockwood, but she quit that to study painting. And she loved music. So she became a piano teacher and a pianist. There is some kind of spirit here that makes people think of, you know, what is really beautiful in life, what really matters."

Stanley Zimiles
"My father's not an artist, but he loves the environment – he was a science teacher, so there's usually that kind of thing going on, that's very important. But actually, there are paintings of his in the closet. He's not an official artist. He did paint. He has painted. But the story was that my uncle Murray went to art school and my father stayed home and lived with his father and step mother and took care of them and went to Hunter College and was going to be an engineer. He was the more practical, stable one. Not that the rest of my family is unstable, but he really focuses more on the future, so his children can go to college. So he's not officially an artist. But he takes photographs. He loves taking photographs."

Dawn Zimiles on the Gelb-Margo-Zimiles Dune Shack

"Everyone on this list [geneology chart above] has used the shack. Not Haika, probably. She died before I was born. You see, all these people have lived in Provincetown. Helene lived in Provincetown for many summers on the west end and went out there. Adrien has spent time out there. Dov went out there with me when I was a kid, but I don't remember it that often, I was pretty young. Every summer we came to Provincetown. Not for the whole summer, but for a chunk of time. We came here to the house and then we went out to the shack. We walked out. Jan had a jeep and she would drive us out. But she died when I was eight. So later on it was with my uncle Boris and my uncle Murray. We'd always go out there. We'd bring food and we'd just go. It was so magical. Later I actually got to stay there on my own. I started staying on my own when I was like eighteen. And I brought my friends from college and went there. This was from art school, so we were into doing little arty things out there. I have not gone out there for months on end. I guess the reason was that the shack was taken over. And of course I didn't live in Provincetown. Seth was out there many times. Both of us would pretty much walk out there ourselves, you know, just kind of sit on the porch, if the door was open, we'd get in there.

"I was trying to describe the feeling that was passed down through my family to my brother and I from my great aunt and uncle, the feeling of what it meant to be there [at the shack] and how it was inspirational for artists… The energy there really inspired, certainly, the earlier generations of my family. And they passed that on. If you talk to my brother, Seth, he'll tell you that it was totally because of Boris and the shack and the dunes and that feeling there, that he wanted to become an artist. And my uncle Murray will say the same, definitely.

"There are varying degrees of success in my family. You see, I think that my family is not very practical. Me. My brother. Except my father. He's a practical one. And Murray's somewhere in the middle. Most of my family to a certain point doesn't want to play by the rules or just do their art in such a way. They are not very practical in that way. But my family does feel very strongly about a life that revolves around creativity and inspiration and nature and that kind of world. There's a reason we all want to have our ashes thrown on the dunes. There's something about that place. It's like, if we are going to return to the source, that's where we really want to go. That's the source. And I have no doubt that if it wasn't for the culture that arose in that time, and my uncle was a major contributor to it along with other people, I don't know if my uncle Murray would have been an artist. My uncle Murray coming here to Provincetown, and the experiences he had as a little boy really led him to do that. My father, even though he wasn't an artist, he always respected and knew art was a valuable thing. Even though he was a high school teacher, he sent me to a really expensive art school. Even though he's so practical, he knew art was a worthwhile pursuit. I think my brother and I always felt that.

"As I said, I used to keep pictures of the shack on my fireplace mantel in San Francisco. I just wanted to make it back here. I had pictures of drawings of the dune roses on the walls of the house. I knew I would come back here… So I think, to maintain that culture, I'd like when my brother's little baby is born, I want to be able to say, 'Look at what family you were born into. Look what we have to offer. Maybe you'll learn to love art too, like we do. Maybe you'll love these dunes too.' You know, I'd like to be able to share that."

Murray and Martha Zimiles on the Uncertain Future

Murray Zimiles: "Prior to Boris' death [in 1995], Boris bequeathed the shack to me. Even though by eminent domain the Seashore took it, I always thought that it would be in my family. When I got involved with the Peaked Hill Trust, I always said, when my family wasn't using it, they could have it free of charge. During that time [Boris' disability], we weren't using it all the time. I have many obligations. But we used it as much as we could and we let some family members use it, and then there'd still be a fair amount of time when it was empty, so rather than waste it, since we knew how wonderful it was, we just gave it to Peaked Hill Trust [to use]. We've known those people for many, many years. We trust them. They've been good to the shacks. They've maintained them and kept them in good order, upgraded them when necessary, etcetera.

"Many of the [other] shacks were rented. But because it is sacred ground, holy ground, I never thought that would be a proper thing to do [with his family's shack]. So literally, hundreds of people have experienced that shack when Boris was still alive. It could have been a profitable enterprise, but we never charged. In fact it cost us money because we had to clean up the mess, nail down the boards that were dislodged after everyone had left. The deal I made with the Peaked Hill Trust was, if they helped to maintain it, they could have other people stay in it. It worked out nicely. This was before Boris passed on. For eleven years, if I remember correctly, I let the Peaked Hill Trust use it.

"The shack's history is a complicated story. For years Boris was persecuted by this man who claimed that he owned the land that the shack was on. He extorted money from the family. He threatened that if Boris didn't pay the money he'd burn the shack down in the winter. So we paid some of the money. Then what happened was that people got together, including Boris and Jan, and tried desperately to gain ownership of these properties. Some people spent their life savings and ultimately lost. You know that story. That story is common knowledge. Boris was part of that group. Finally, the only deal they could make was life tenancy. So Boris and Jan in a sense were coerced to signing papers which meant that at least for their lives they wouldn't be evicted. My brother, until a couple of years ago, has been paying taxes on the shack, even though the National Seashore took it over by eminent domain. I finally told him to stop, but we wanted to keep our claim. So we were paying taxes up until about three years ago, though it was idiotic. We were paying taxes to the town of Provincetown.

"Boris legally gave me the shack with the document that you've seen. It was sort of a leap of faith, him saying, 'This is what I wanted to do. This is what you should have. So here's the document.' But obviously it hasn't improved things. The Seashore hasn't made any gestures. And when the Seashore did give leases out, they gave shacks to people who had nothing to do with them, which is astonishing to me, since I built it, and if anyone knew how to maintain it, if anyone had any right it [it would be that person]. Why would those people get leases and not someone like me, who literally built the place?

"I woke up one day and basically it was in the newspapers that the Seashore had taken over the shack. It was now theirs, or something like that. And they, I guess, turned it over to Peaked Hill Trust. That was always a bit unclear to me. It was never really explained. Peaked Hill Trust was kind enough to give me a couple weeks, I suppose because of my largesse of letting them have it for eleven years without ever charging a dime for anybody, for anything. This is now being reduced to one week. So it's very tenuous. Of course, my son would love to go. My niece would love to go. My family would love to go, many people in my family. It was a family

shack. But now I'm the only one – one week. It's tragic. And as I said, there are people out there with twenty-year leases who before had nothing to do with the dunes."

Martha Zimiles: What we've tried to do is, when we know we're going to be out there, we try to link up with his brother, Stan, and Ruth. And now that Dawn is living in Provincetown, we try to round up her and her brother, and we all go out there together. Schlep our picnics out on foot, stay until dark.

Murray: That kind of thing. But you know, there's not much else you can do with other people beyond that.

Martha: We make a conscious effort to gather there.

Wolfe: So the energy that you were talking about has not passed simply because Jan and Boris have passed? It's still there at the shack for the family?

Murray: Oh, I think so. Absolutely. But unfortunately, not very many people can get there anymore. Without that as the pivot it becomes almost like stories as opposed to realities.

Murray: If the shack's care came back to our family, we would discuss who would go when. It wouldn't be complicated. It's not hard to work out. When there's down time, which I suspect could happen now and then, then as I had done before, an organization like Peaked Hill Trust that respects the dunes and knows how to take care of it, would have other people use it. Now they are sharing it with the Fine Arts Work Center. The art connection obviously still exists. If they wanted to continue that when we're not using it, why not? I have no problem with that. There's nothing there to steal. It's just a shack. I could rebuild that shack, without exaggeration, in two days. Maybe the foundation would take a little longer, but the physical building would take a couple days. So we're not talking about a big deal.

Martha: I could see you and Dawn and Seth and Andre having a real bonding by being out there, having a time when you would go together to spruce it up, doing repairs, a great thing for the family.

Murray: We're a close family. There's no strife within the family, thank goodness.

Murray: But, you know, it's just weird the way it was handled. To this day, I just don't understand how the Seashore came to certain conclusions. I've written letters, met with the head of the National Seashore at Cape Cod. I didn't know what else to do. What else can you do? I mean, I don't have that much money to fight them. I don't see doing that. So what recourse does one have, other than to ask for fairness? If you're giving leases, then give it to people who have an actual connection. Don't give it to strangers. Do it openly, and do it fairly.

Connections and Living Traditions

The example of the Gelb-Margo-Zimiles shack illustrates how dune dwelling families become connected with the Provincetown art colony and how these connections evolve over the stages in a family's developmental cycle. It also illustrates the potential changes in connections when a shack reservation comes to term and potential impacts on living traditions. In this case, the shacks used by the Margolis-Zimiles family, built on the eroding slopes of Peaked Hill, went through several incarnations, at least three according to Murray Zimiles. The family's shacks fell down and were reconstituted several times. Before the shacks, the Gelb-Margo family had lived on the dunes in an outbuilding of the coast guard station, and then its boathouse. Eventually, the family had a house in Provincetown as well as the shack on the dunes. The family also had residences, studios, and showing galleries in New York, where they were connected to the larger art community.

Like many other shacks, the core users of the Gelb-Margo-Zimiles shacks comprised an extended family, in this case, a multigenerational line of visual artists, sculptors, graphic artists, writers, dancers, and musicians, many of them "artist's artists," committed more to creative expression as ways of life than as profitable professions. Like many other shacks, members of the Margolis-Zimiles family came and went seasonally from the Provincetown art colony and the family shack. Over time, the shack became a type of "sacred ground" for family members, a place of creative renewal, and eventually, a place of eternal rest. As children, Murray (in the second generation) and Dawn (in the third generation) came to the shack under the care of older family heads. As adults, Murray and Dawn chose to continue the family tradition of seasonal stays, almost like a "pilgrimage," an essential element of the yearly cycle of creative work of many family members. The familial pattern extended three generations, with Dawn already anticipating a fourth.

Like many other shacks, the Gelb-Margo-Zimiles shack was used by substantial numbers of friends and associates of the family, principally but not exclusively drawn from the art colony at Provincetown. Generous and genial, Boris Margo, an art genius in his own right, attracted many notable artists out to the shack. Jan Gelb, who became the primary user of the shack at one point in time, also attracted many friends and associates. In this way, the shack became connected to the art colony in Provincetown, with creative artists and writers coming and going, experiencing the dunes and the shack through the family's generosity. As described elsewhere, Connie Armstrong (Armstrong shack) remembered helping Gelb prepare for parties at the shack, working with Grace Bessay (Bessay shack) on their periodic visits from the southern neighborhood. Eventually, Margo and Gelb came to host huge August full moon gatherings by their shack, an event that for a while was the largest annual community celebration at Provincetown.

As with other shacks, the pattern of shack use evolved with the developmental cycle of the Margolis-Zimiles extended family. Jan Gelb died, the two live-in nephews (Murray and Stan) worked to establish careers off cape, and Boris's health deteriorated, leaving longer periods of "dead time" at the shack. During this period of about eleven years, others were invited by the family to use the shack ("hundreds of people", according to Murray). Among these was Irene Briga, who described in Chapter 4 how she became a dune dweller primarily through the Gelb-Margo-Zimiles shack. No shack user was ever formally charged for the use of the shack, as it didn't seem "proper" to the family, except for the request to help care for the shack. During this family period, Boris and Murray invited the Peaked Hill Trust to use the shack in exchange for care. It was a local group personally known to them and trusted, caring for the two Werner shacks. So over time, the shack of the core extended family became connected with a much wider social and cultural sphere, including the Provincetown art colony (through friends and associates), the Provincetown community (through the howling moon celebrations), the nonprofit organizations (through friendly mutual arrangements), neighboring shack users (through visiting), and the wider American art community (primarily through the New York art schools, art networks, and galleries). While illustrating these many connections, the Gelb-Margo-Zimiles shack is not unique among the shacks. It provides a clear example of the more general cultural pattern of shack use over time by families, and their linkages with friendship networks and larger communities.

The most significant break in traditional use patterns for the Gelb-Margo-Zimiles shack occurred when the death of Boris Margo in 1995 brought to term the shack's reservation of use with the Seashore. Customarily, care-taking responsibilities for shacks passed to designated heirs, commonly new heads in an extended family line, in this case, the nephew raised by Boris Margo and Jan Gelb who had helped build the current shack and continuously used it. With the

Gelb-Margo-Zimiles shack, the significant change was that Peaked Hill Trust became the legal occupant, a selection by the Seashore. Decisions regarding shack use and upkeep previously directed by family shack heads (Jan, Boris, and Murray) have become responsibilities of a twelve-member board of the non-profit organization. In the past several years, the shack has housed an artist-in-residence program at the request of the Seashore, as well as weekly residencies of members of Peaked Hill Trust as either random awards or compensation for providing domestic services for other shack users. Under this new program, the customary uses of the Margolis-Zimiles family have become restricted to a single week ("because of my largesse," Murray supposed). Otherwise, the family's use of the shack was dependent upon individuals joining the non-profit organization and getting randomly selected for a week's spot (a one-in-three chance, according to Julie Schecter) or getting a week in compensation for providing domestic services to other awarded shack users. Use also might be awarded through applications to the three-week artist-in-resident program.

As described by Murray Zimiles, the three-generation connections of the Margolis-Zimiles line to the dune shack, the "spiritual center" of the family, were "very tenuous." The case of this shack also is not unique, as all family shacks have tenures set in reservations or leases. It illustrates the potential fragility of any traditional cultural pattern whose survival depends on being passed down from one generation to another. A cultural pattern may disappear within a single generation if the chain of transmission is broken. As stated by Murray Zimiles, the family tradition of art on the dunes "becomes almost like stories as opposed to realities." The fragility of traditions was expressed by Dawn Zimiles on very personal terms, thinking about the next generation, the as-yet unborn children: "to maintain that culture, I'd like when my brother's little baby is born, to want to be able to say, 'Look what family you were born into. Look what we have to offer. Maybe you'll learn to love art too, like we do. Maybe you'll love these dunes too.'" Like the fragile shacks themselves, vulnerable to winter storms and fluid sands, the traditional culture of dune shack society also demonstrates a fragile quality, its survival depending upon the strength of connections of long-term resident families with the dunes and the shacks.

Chapter 9. Cultural Traditions III: The Edge of Nature and Society

The two previous chapters have showed how certain cultural traditions of dune dwellers derive from "Old Provincetown" and the Provincetown art colony. This chapter identifies a third broad tradition finding expression on the dunes: environmentalism, living in Nature and learning from it. These themes are found in the writings of Henry Thoreau and Henry Beston, two historic figures connected to the dunes and precursors to the environmental movement of the mid-20th century. In their simple shacks, dune dwellers perceived themselves to be living close to Nature at the edge of human society. In interviews, no one said to me that they were intentionally following in the footsteps of Thoreau and Beston by living on the dunes, though many considered these authors kindred spirits. Some dune dwellers perceived their way of life to be an advance over the works of Thoreau and Beston. What these two historic figures briefly experienced and wrote about, the dune dwellers were accomplishing in fact over the long haul. Dune dwelling demonstrated how humans could live simply in Nature, benefiting from the experience while preserving its natural qualities

This chapter describes the expression of environmentalism in dune shack society. As shown below, some expressions were fairly direct, like the outrageous art projects of Jay Critchley, head of the C-Scape shack. But other expressions were subtle, ideas conveyed in the telling of dune stories constructed and colored so that they carried ecological messages. Collectively, this type of lore and art expresses themes about the environment and the place of people within it. They show that dune dwellers were purposively attempting to fit into unspoiled natural systems. Dune shack society was a small human community living within Nature, learning from Nature, and attempting to preserve Nature.

Dune Stories About Nature

Much is conveyed in folklore. A well-told story entertains and enlightens simultaneously. During interviews, I never specifically asked for stories. Nevertheless, a number of dune dwellers told them. They wanted to, I could see, because they were fun to tell, while illustrating pertinent points. Many stories were personal. Others were historical, part of dune shack lore. And several stories were about the natural world. I could see they conveyed views of Nature and its relationships with dune dwellers. Thinking about these examples, I understood the local folklore expressed a kind of modern environmental activism with lessons for a wider audience.

The next four stories are examples. I have extracted them from interviews with particular dune shack residents. As I said, they were spontaneously told during an interview session. I believe the stories express ideas that are fairly widespread among dune dwellers. Ideas include a respect for Nature, a willingness to accommodate with Nature, and the necessity of taking moral lessons from Nature. As printed here, the stories closely track the original telling. However, the titles for the stories are mine. Following each story, I identify some of the environmental ideas implicit in the tale.

In the first story, Paul Tasha provides an interesting first-person account of Peaked Hill, the hill giving its name to many things on the backshore – the infamous Peaked Hill Bars, the historic Peaked Hill Coast Guard Station, and the current Peaked Hill Trust. His story purports to answer a very basic question, "Where is Peaked Hill?" As we learn from the story, it's gone. The story explains where, how, and why.

The End of Peaked Hill. Told by Paul Tasha

It started out this way. There was a path to the left of the cottage.

That dune, if you can envision it now, it just towered up, way up above the cottage. It was the biggest dune out here. And it blew away.

It started out with a little path over the top. That path got wider and deeper, and wider and bigger, until finally Peaked Hill, instead of being this great big, broad-shouldered dune, turned into a split dune with a gouge in the middle. Then it all just blew into the wetland. Eventually, both sides blew in and there was nothing left.

The wetland now has fifteen to twenty feet of sand in it, with its own little dunes. But that wasn't like that when I was a kid, some forty-five years ago.

I remember it well. It was a big, towering dune with a little tiny path. And that path should never have been made. That path led to the destruction of what had been a landmark for generations.

Picture courtesy of the Zimiles family

Paul Tasha tells the quintessential dune shack story. It contains ideas and beliefs common within dune shack society. The first is that long-term dune dwellers are experts. They give witness to dune history. Watching the dunes for forty-five years, dune dwellers like Paul Tasha know things now hidden from view. The story packs considerable environmental information in a small space. According to Tasha, Peaked Hill was a large barrier dune near the water. The dune changed in size and shape over the years, from "towering" and "broad-shouldered," to "split," to "nothing." Re-deposited sand from the dune completely covered a wetland to its lee, fifteen to twenty feet deep. Today, someone could not know by direct observation that there used to be a substantial wetland and tall dune in these places. The story also explains what caused the changes: wind blowing out a footpath to the dune's top. Small acts by humans (a "little tiny path") can lead to big effects in Nature. The story ends with a moral lesson: "that path should never have been made." The misplaced path diminished natural systems (the dune and wetlands) and a local heritage ("a landmark for generations"). While this particular story may not be widely known in dune shack society, the moral lesson is. Many dune residents I interviewed explained their careful placement and use of footpaths around their shacks to avoid blowouts. Blowouts held the potential for reconfiguring the landscape, undermining shacks, and disrupting things of value. The customary rule was that humans should live lightly on the dunes making as few

directed changes to the landscape as possible. Accidents might still happen. But proper dune living should be done with foresight toward preserving Nature.

The second story is a funny, first-person account of drilling a water well in the sand at the Malicoat shack. Conrad Malicoat tells the story:

The Toad. Told by Conrad Malicoat

There was an incident that happened out here at the shack. We were digging this well. You dig a well with this auger that's like a bucket that's been split and had no bottom. It was a little deformed so that when you twisted it, it would bring sand into the center of it, and then you could lift it out, and drop off the sand so you could dig down 20, 30 feet, or whatever, before you hit water. Three of us, my dad, a friend of his, and myself were out there doing this. What you do is, you add extensions on, one after another, and you keep going deeper, deeper and deeper, and we got down to about 16 to 20 feet to where we hit water.

We were very content and now we were going to put the pipes down so we could get the pump going, and so forth. Just at that time, before we got the piping set, this frog jumped in, or toad. He jumped into the hole – all the way down.

So, we went back up to the house and got three bottles of beer. We all sat around wondering what are we going to do. We can't just start driving these pipes down on this poor toad. So we all had this parlay. And it was very funny. And all of a sudden this inspiration came – how to evacuate the toad.

It was this. The three of us were all around the hole like this, ushering in some sand, like this. And this went on very slowly, just filling it back in, very slowly. And this went on for 15, 20 minutes, half an hour, I don't know how long, very carefully so that you don't bury the poor thing. And pretty soon, all of a sudden, we fill the hole right up to the top. And this toad jumps right out.

We re-dug the hole someplace just off to the side. Where else would you do that except on the dunes?

Like the Peaked Hill story, Conrad Malicoat's story is another lesson about people and Nature. It's wonderfully told, with a great choice of language and a fine structure, filled with surprise, mounting tension, and satisfying resolution. It starts ostensibly as an account about the technical aspects of digging a well with an auger, a familiar task for most dune residents. But suddenly it turns into a story about a toad. Out of the blue, a toad jumps into the finished hole. This is the first lesson. Nature does unexpected things to dune dwellers: storm surges, blowouts, hurricane winds, even small toads. The immediate reaction to the crisis is emblematic of dune dwelling. Everyone gets a beer. Crisis is comedy, not tragedy. The story is wonderfully coy: it teases the reader to figure out the problem, which is, of course, whether to drink water from a well with a dead toad at the bottom. But the story never frames it this way. It's not a problem for people, but a problem for the "poor toad." The challenge is how to "evacuate" the "poor thing." The solution is elegantly simple: undo what was just done, slowly refilling the hole with small bits of sand to save the toad, and restart the well elsewhere. This solution expresses a core principle in dune shack society: human activity on the dunes should attempt to preserve Nature, even one

poor toad. Why? In this case, this approach mutually benefits people (clean well water) and Nature (live toads). The story's tag line shows a keen awareness that preserving Nature at the cost of human inconvenience is not usual within the mainstream: "where else would you do that except on the dunes?"

The third story is also a humorous, first-person account of people and animals on the dunes. It tells how a group of Provincetown children get exposed to the natural wonders of the dunes above East Harbor (Pilgrim Lake), right in their own backyard. Maureen Joseph Hurst tells the dune story, calling it a "Tasha story" because it begins and ends at the house of Herman and Sunny Tasha on Howland Street in Provincetown:

The Turtles. Told by Maureen Joseph Hurst

I'd love to tell you a Tasha story about East Harbor when we were young, really young. So many great things happened up at that house. One Friday night – Fridays were always good nights because it was the weekend and we were there after school – one Friday night Herman Tasha announced to us, "All right, tomorrow morning I'm going to wake you kids up really early. You gotta get out of bed. I have something I want show you." It was June and we were getting ready for school to let out. We were just waiting for school vacation.

He woke us up before dawn and piled us into one of those old little jeeps, those little army-issue jeeps that he had, with the tin seats in the back. And he drove us out over the dunes from High Head, along the back end of East Harbor. We still didn't know what we were doing. Then when we got there, he said, "Now, what you're going to do is get out of the jeep and be very quiet. I don't want you to talk. And you're going to crawl on your stomachs up over the crest of this dune and wait and watch because the huge snapping turtles…" and they were almost as wide as this table, "… are going to come out of East Harbor and they're going to lay their eggs." So we crawled up on our bellies, up to the crest of that dune, and we waited. And sure enough, out of East Harbor came these big lugging snapping turtles that were HUGE. We were little, like ten or eleven years old. I still remember to this day their back flippers digging the holes and the eggs pouring out. He didn't want us to disturb the turtles while they were laying their eggs, so he wasn't saying very much to us. But after the turtles turned around and were crawling back in, he went and grabbed two of these huge snapping turtles, picked them up, and threw them in the back of the jeep. And then Del got one of the sets of snapping turtle eggs. They had the consistency of ping-pong balls. He brought them back.

As we rode home, jumping up and down in the back seat of the jeep on those little tin seats, these turtles were crawling around the bottom. He said, "Keep your legs up! They'll snap your leg off!" Today, you'd probably get thrown in jail if you exposed to your child to a snapping turtle. But that was like, "See, see 'em? See how dangerous they are? Keep your legs up in the air!" And we were terrified, screaming, "Ahhh! Ahhh!" *[Laughter.]* He drove us home all the way to Howland Street, takes the turtles and throws them in this big bird cage he had in his yard. They were crawling all around in the cage. He showed us the consistency of the snapping turtle eggs. Then we buried them around the yard. Paula had said to us, "When he was little he had to go out and harvest some of these eggs, and his mother would cook them." I remember we named one of the turtles "June," because it was the month of June.

He let us observe these turtles for the next week. Then one day we got home right before school let out for the summer and the turtles were gone. He had picked them up and brought them back to East Harbor, put them back where they belonged. But we got to see what they were like in all of this. Then sometime around mid-to-late July, Howland Street, which was not more than a dirt road up in front of Tasha Hill at the time, was crawling with all these sea turtles. They were all heading down toward the bay. They were making their way down to water. Somehow they knew. So we had to gather up as many as we could so we could bring them back and stick them back in East Harbor. What a learning experience that was for us, first hand.

This wonderfully-told, high-energy story is about Provincetown children being specifically taught about Nature, about the dunes in their own backyard. This is not a story about "wilderness," of untouched natural wonders seen by detached visitors. At Provincetown, people actively engage with Nature. They get their hands dirty. And snapping turtles are tough enough to take it ("See, see 'em? See how dangerous they are? Keep your legs up in the air!"). Herman Tasha, the instructor, was a commercial fisherman and a natural scientist with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. He taught a hands-on lesson. The story's told with a child's wide-eyed delight. Nature is filled with wonders: giant turtles lugging up from the black sea, soft eggs buried in sand, baby turtles instinctively scrambling toward water. The story also tells of customs and responsibilities toward Nature, adapted to changing conditions. In his childhood, Herman Tasha gathered turtle eggs for food. By the late 1950s (the time of this story), Tasha had observed declining turtle populations, attributed to increased predation by foxes and raccoons related to increased human population on Cape Cod (more summer homes, more trash). To help preserve turtles, Tasha began relocating turtle egg caches around East Harbor to decrease predation (the reburied caches had fewer turtle signs to attract predators). The young girls were part of that type of expedition. Efforts continue today to restore East Harbor. It's currently being returned to a more brackish, tidally-influenced system with new channel management, nearer to conditions before railroad construction cut it off from the bay in the mid-19th century. The active, hands-on involvement with natural systems, and the perceived responsibilities to preserve natural systems, as expressed in this story, were widespread ideas in dune shack society. I heard examples of restoration efforts by dune shack residents involving turtles, toads, frogs, plovers, terns, and dune grass.

The fourth story is one of several hunting stories told to me by Paul Tasha while mapping named significant places. Most dune dwellers were not hunters, like Tasha. But I think the story expresses a theme common among dune dwellers, a lesson taught by a singular mysterious event one snowy afternoon:

Paying Respects. Told by Paul Tasha

For me, there are so many places on the dunes that have significance but don't have a name. For example, on this vegetated ridge, when I was about seventeen or eighteen years old, Bruce Coria, a local boy of Portuguese descent a couple years older than me, shot a big eight-point buck with a palmate, flat, almost moosey-looking rack. Kind-of weird. He gutted the deer right here. He left the gut pile.

A few days later I was out hunting in a snowstorm, which is a good time to hunt deer because if you pick up a fresh track you're right on it. And I did. I picked up a fresh track. The snow had just started to ease up, and the deer had come out. I had my gun and I was on

a horse. I remember I picked up a fresh track right along the edge of the dune, where the dunes meet the forest here, where there is the big oak forest above Grassy. I trail this deer, obviously a big buck, to here.

It was the weirdest thing. There was another big buck track coming from here, and three smaller deer coming from there. And they all did this circle around the gut pile. It was really weird. I mean, they knew this deer, obviously. The deer know each other. They're like the people of the dunes. They know each other. They fight with each other. They argue. They get along. Whatever goes on, you know. But it was just a really strange thing. They had the snow all trampled around. Three deer from here, one big buck, three smaller deer, another big buck. They all came and went to that deer's gut pile. And they circled round and round it. I don't know why to this day. And they had definitely come together to that gut pile of that animal that they knew, for whatever reason. They didn't walk on the gut. They just circled round and round it and then they all went off in different directions.

It had to be close to the same time because of the snow. The snowstorm was just ending and I had said, "Oh boy," grabbed my gun and horse and gone out. And it was still spitting a little bit. So it had to have just happened shortly before I got there. I think it was a total of about five to six deer. The two bigger animals and what looked like a group of three smaller animals like maybe a doe and two yearlings. It was interesting, you know. "Paying their respects?" It looked that way.

This story expresses the mysterious complexities of Nature, aspects of the natural realm that seem difficult to comprehend, at odds with common, rational explanations. In the details of the hunt, we see the keen observational skills of Paul Tasha regarding local landscape and weather. He knows deer well. Yet Nature springs a surprise, something "weird," hard to understand unless deer have some unacknowledged capabilities. In the original telling, Paul ended the story with the statement, "It was interesting, you know," leaving me to pull the threads together, to arrive at its implications. It was me who said, "Paying their respects?" I had guessed right. "It looked that way," affirmed Paul, and then he laughed. Elsewhere the story speaks of the complexities of deer society: "They're like the people of the dunes. They know each other. They fight with each other. They argue. They get along. Whatever goes on, you know." The story's central message is that there's more to deer and deer society then commonly supposed by people. Some of this belief may derive from his mother, Sunny Tasha, a Lithuanian by way of Pennsylvania with animistic ideas about Nature. Some of it may emerge from his personal hunting experiences, as Paul allowed that the more he got to know his prey, the harder it became for him to kill them. But this view of Nature was not just specific to Paul Tasha. I saw it among other dune dwellers, a respect toward animals because their lives and communities were believed to be rich and complex and worthy of discovery. Charlie Schmid made it his life goal to observe dune swallows. And four dune residents I interviewed had found employment with Whale Watch or other marine mammal research the year of the study (Lawrence Schuster, Irene Briga, David Andrew Clemons, and Marsha Dunn), occupations directed toward understanding the complexity of animal communities.

Dune Art About Nature: The Work of Jay Critchley

Like stories, some of the artwork and literature of dune dwellers expressed ideas about people and Nature. A prime example of literature is the beautiful memoir by Cynthia Huntington, *The Salt House,* chronicling her insights about self and Nature living three years in a dune shack. A prime example in art was the work of Jay Critchley, head of the C-Scape shack. Critchley was both a conceptual artist and an environmental activist. His audacious artwork commonly expressed ideas about people and Nature with directives for action ("proposals" he called them). Much of his work derived from an interplay between dunes and town, as he explained:

> My work is about the whole town and Nature, basically. How people, human beings, interact with Nature. That's why I'm out there [on the dunes]. My real draw, living here, is out to the backshore, out into the National Park, probably more than downtown. I'm a social being too and I like the downtown. It's nice to know it's there and everything, but my focus is out into the National Park. So my opportunity to manage the C-Scape dune shack was like a blessing, because it gave me an outpost in the Park to continue my exploration of the natural environment and experience the natural environment in all four seasons and continue collecting, gathering 'information objects' from the beach, documenting changes going on out there. Well, the whole town is a laboratory in a sense. But I think the dune shack provides an outpost, an anchoring of relationship with the Park and the natural world around it, for me as an artist. I haven't spent as much time out there as I'd like because we rent it most of the time. But in the winter, in the off-season, is more the time that I've been out there. Plus I've been out at the Jones shack a lot.

I visited Critchley at his Provincetown home to view examples of his work. Critchley presented them to me with short sketches that teased the imagination. Like the dune stories above, each piece conveyed messages. The cheeky art pieces were designed to shock sensibilities toward more expansive perspectives. A selection of Critchley's pieces are presented below, with his thumbnail descriptions. They begin with his "weed garden," a piece of conceptual art just outside his doorstep that we passed, entering his house:

> Weed Garden
> This is my weed garden. These are all weeds that I've nurtured. I haven't planted anything here. I also have my organic garden over there. But here I've just allowed and nurtured whatever grew, like these Jerusalem artichokes, with little tubulars that you can eat. In September they blossom with little yellow flowers, each stalk a dozen or so, like sunflowers. A polkweed that I'm bonsai-ing, cut in the shape of the area here. Queen Anne's lace. Wild mint. A couple of other things.

> Lobster Claw Ceremonial Helmet
> This is my ceremonial helmet with real lobster claws. I first used it in 1983. I got them at a yard sale in town. I figure it was about a thirty or thirty-five pound lobster.

Black Fish Family Album

That's a picture of a black fish, a pilot whale. It's on a wheelbarrow, just the head of the fish. It's an old image, an historic photograph from the Pilgrim Monument. You can see it's a wooden wheelbarrow and you've got this perfectly cut-off head, a head of a fish on a wheelbarrow. It's like a portrait. So I put it on the cover of this elaborate ruffled wedding album. This is called the Black Fish Family Album. The question is, what is the family history of this fish that has been killed? Do we even care? Do we know? And do we care about it? I guess it's the question.

Sand-Encrusted Objects

This is a sand-encrusted, entombed SUV. This was done way back. It's a mummified jeep. And this is a model of my sand car, which was in the parking lot [in Provincetown]. I did a series of cars in the parking lot encrusted with sand. Full-sized cars. This was 1981. The sand car series from 1981-84 was in the MacMillan Parking Lot each summer. The first was a 1968 Dodge Coronet 500 station wagon encrusted in sand. The next year I had the Sand Family inside. Ronnie and Nancy. Encrusted people. The third summer was a sand-filled car, a sedan. And then the fourth summer was a sandblasted car.

As far as encrusting things, well, I could say a lot of things about it. But I like to gather indigenous materials from the environment [like sand] and then use them in a way that juxtaposes them with common, everyday objects, the idea behind a lot of these pieces. It says something about utility as well as the incongruity of how separate we become from natural elements at the same time. There's a lot of things you could say about it. You could interpret it as Nature reclaiming human objects. With the fourth one, I took a sand blaster and stripped the paint and everything off the entire car and let it rust all summer long. So it was the destructive power of Nature as well.

The name of the series of car pieces was, "Just visiting for the weekend." The idea was that people used to come to Provincetown and immediately fall in love with it. They come for the weekend and then they'd stay, move here. Of course, that can only happen now to people with money. But there's something about the sand that gets in your brain. The whole town is a sand dune. Geologically, Provincetown is very different from the rest of the cape. It's created by the wind and waves. The glacier ended at High Head. It's a much newer

geological formation than the rest of the cape. I like this idea that the whole town is a sand dune. We're all on these little tiny grains of sand that have been moved here, one at a time.

This piece is a proposal for a Fisherman's Memorial. It's a sand-encrusted boat, made about fifteen years ago. It has a Christmas tree. A lot of the Portuguese boats put Christmas trees on top of the mast to ward off evil spirits, a good luck thing.

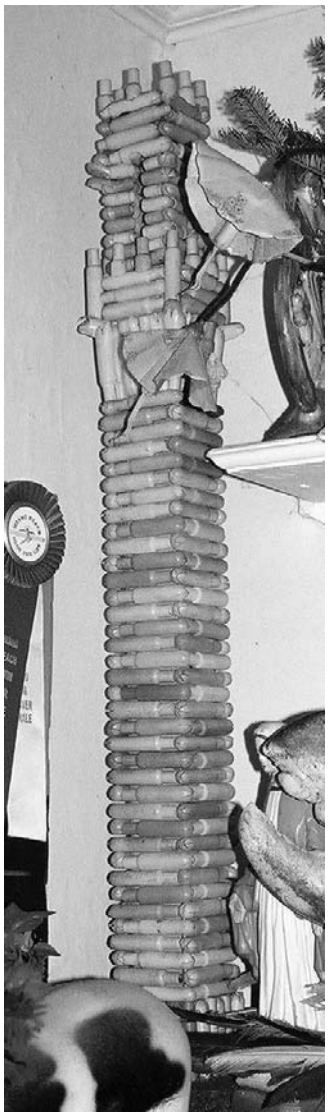
That's a found spray can, encrusted. I found it on the beach, probably at Race Point or the dune shacks. This was also found, a Styrofoam buoy. What happens is, when these Styrofoam pieces go underwater, the pressure is so great that it pushes the air out of them, so this creates this Madonna kind-of image. But my favorite piece is this Styrofoam cup which is shrunk down to about a third of its size, yet still in one piece, because it went into the deep, pressurized water.

Fish Skinned Objects

I also use fish skins to make fish skin-covered, encrusted objects. Obviously you see a lot of religious icons everywhere. This is the Pieta in fish skins. That's the Sacred Heart of Jesus encrusted in fish skin. The top is with flounders. They dry on to the statue itself. They cling when you dip them in a Roplex type liquid glue, and then you put them on to the object. And these are fish skin encrusted high heels. This is flounder. I've used cod too. Whatever's available. This is a fish skin mask of my face. I did an original mask. Then I made a positive plaster from the original form. Then I used that to put fish skin on. It's in the center of a globe, a hand-painted Zodiac circle of wood that was from a floor-mounted globe. It lights up and blinks: the top half is a red and the bottom half yellow light.

My father was a fur trapper. For him, the muskrats were there to harvest, basically. In fact, when one of the environmental groups wanted to outlaw the leghold traps in Connecticut, my father went up to the state legislature. That was the only issue he got political about – trapping, and abortion. I think that his view of Nature was the basic, traditional Christian thing where it was meant for us to exploit, not just to use. It was unlimited. We weren't thinking about any damage we could do to it because it was considered to be there for us to exploit and use to our benefit. Today, I'm sure he would have a slightly different view of it. I'm sure he would have a broader sense of things. Even a lot of the hunting organizations and recreational vehicle groups have become environmental friendly in some ways. It's about protecting the land and ecosystems, so they can go out and continue to fish and hunt. It's a totally different political environment now.

Tampon Pilgrim Monument



I think I told you that I collect plastic tampon applicators? That's the Pilgrim Monument, made out of plastic tampon applicators. It lights up from inside. I'm well known in town for my plastic tampon applicators. I've been collecting off the beaches since 1978, mostly from the Boston sewage system. They used to dump them in the harbor. Then they'd float across. Boston Harbor was a disaster. That's one of the reasons George Bush Sr. won the Presidential election, because he came to Boston Harbor to show that Michael Dukakis had allowed the harbor to be polluted. So they created a 9.5 mile outfall pipe that goes in the middle of Cape Cod Bay. They've almost cleaned up Boston Harbor, but now they're shipping hundreds of millions of gallons of secondarily-treated water and sewage into Cape Cod Bay, 9.5 miles into the middle of the bay. They're monitoring it. It's a big concern of mine and a lot of people. I also have a Miss Tampon Liberty. And a gown with 3,000 applicators.

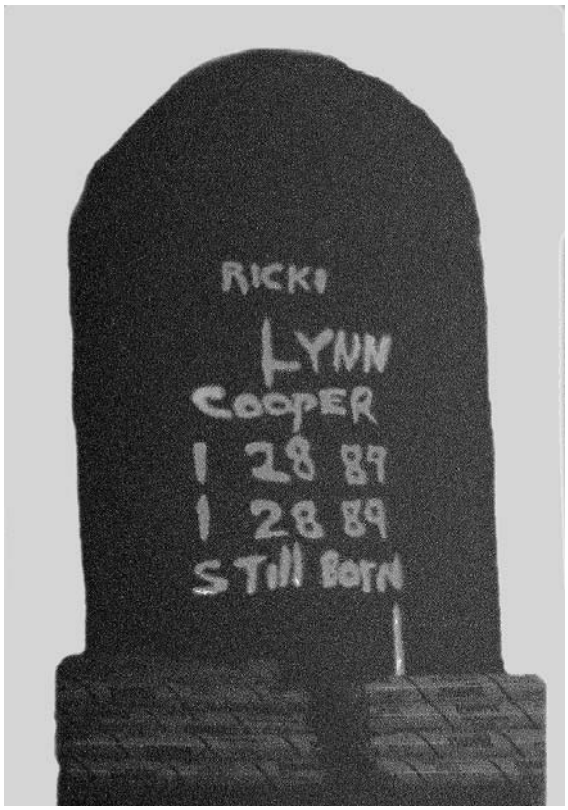
These two pieces are mason jar water samples from "before the outfall pipe" and "after the outfall pipe." Mason jars. I had a big ceremony out at Race Point the actual moment that the pipe's spigot was turned on in Boston. They had this big elaborate official ceremony there. So I had a ceremony at Race Point Beach sort of lamenting, and honoring, all the animals, the fish and organisms in the water, before they're blasted with all this water from the sewers of Boston. So one jar says, "Salt Water Specimen No.1 BP" (Before the Pipe), 9/06/00, and this one says "AP" (After the Pipe), 10/04/00. So that's that.

My audience is worldwide. I founded the Tampon Applicator Creative Club International, TACCI [pronounced "Tacky"]. And I sponsored legislation in Boston. In Massachusetts, citizens can directly sponsor legislation. So I sponsored legislation to ban the sale and manufacture of non-disposable feminine hygiene products, basically plastic tampon applicators. I've been up at the state legislature with my tampon gown a couple of times. The work has been disseminated on the wire services a lot. A lot of the projects have made it onto the AP and UPI wire services. I promote the projects, the ideas. But there have been a number of times that what I do has been censored by the editors. There was a big article that Associated Press was going to do on tampon applicators about fifteen years ago. I went up to Boston. They took pictures. They wrote the article. And then the editors decided it was too radical to put in the papers. Too gross. Too controversial.

That piece is a Plastic Tampon Applicator Ceremonial Necklace with red fishing bobs, baby seagull feathers. And there's my Tampon Pie, a piece of the tampon pie.

Sand-Encrusted Memorial

This piece, "Ricki Lynn Cooper, 1/28/89 to 1/28/89, Still Born," is a tombstone-shaped, sand-encrusted piece with red lettering coming through the sand. Those words were spray-painted on a wall at the beach. What happened to this couple was this. The woman had a stillborn baby. They were both drug addicts. She didn't know she was pregnant. All of a sudden, this fetus appeared. So the man took the fetus down to the beach and buried it right next to the seawall. He spray-painted these words on to the seawall. It was 1989, right at the time a lot of people were dying of AIDS. Death was so much a part of the community. I just thought it was a very primitive, intuitive way of responding to death. Eventually the woman got charged with illegally disposing human waste. She was taken into court. But the judge threw it out. So I created this memorial to Ricki Lynn Cooper. That's what that is.



P-Town Incorporated

This piece is the logo for the theme park I created. It's on a mouse pad. It has a happy whale, the Pilgrim monument in the form of a skull-and-crossbones, with the gay rainbow flag. P-Town Incorporated, Formerly Provincetown. The slogan is, "You'll swear you were really there." It's all about the money. The town has become a town for the affluent. It's based on Disney World.

Not too many artists in town do what I do. Conceptual art. Dealing with ideas with a lot of political and cultural content, with different mediums. Usually the ideas are concrete in terms of proposals I'm making, or the objects incorporating natural materials with found materials in ways that make some kind of statement about humans and Nature. My work is as much about the politics as it is about the aesthetics, about the materials. The challenge is to bring those together in a way that's aesthetically pleasing, and integrated with some kind of challenge to the viewer or the public.

As shown above, Jay Critchley expresses a form of environmental activism in many of his conceptual art pieces. Others in dune shack society also were environmental activists. Paul Tasha was active in fisheries management, advocating sustainable, local fisheries with fishing technologies that did not damage the environment. He also worked to preserve wetland habitats of threatened turtles against development in Provincetown. Laurie Schecter was an environmental activist in Florida. And as discussed in previous chapters, Salvatore and Josephine Del Deo worked to preserve the Province Lands for development. They recently had a portion of the property surrounding their home in Provincetown designated an environmental preserve.

Thoreau, Beston, and Dune Shack Traditions

It's not difficult to find the works of Henry Thoreau and Henry Beston for sale in the tourist shops of Cape Cod. Even without buying the books, tourists can read selections of their works in interpretive displays of the Cape Cod National Seashore. Both Massachusetts authors have been incorporated into the history and environmental traditions of Cape Cod.

Henry Thoreau was a Transcendentalist. Transcendentalism was a philosophic and literary movement of the mid-19th century, coming out of New England (Siepmann 1987:991). It was a reaction against extreme scientific rationalism, relying upon intuition in comprehending the natural world, where natural facts embodied spiritual truths. The movement disregarded external authority, trusting in direct experience. About a half-century later, Henry Beston lived and wrote for a year from a dune cottage on a sand spit at the fringes of Eastham. He lived further up the cape from the Provincetown dunes, but still on the great Outer Beach. In his enforced hermitage, he sought to exorcise his personal demons from the Great War through Nature, separated from the destructive madness of "modern civilization." He was a contemporary of the earliest dune shack people. His naturalistic observations published in the *The Outermost House* are considered classics in America's 20th-century environmental movement.

Both Thoreau and Beston were well-read in dune shack society. Many dune shack residents I interviewed said they knew them. High values in dune shack society today seemed not inconsistent with transcendentalism (unconventionality, intuition, freedom of individual expression, Nature embodying truths). Similarly, the methods of many current dune dwellers (living in solitude with Nature) paralleled those used by Beston.

During interviews, I directly asked three dune dwellers (Jay Critchley, Lawrence Schuster, and Peter Clemons) if they might be modern-day "transcendentalists." Jay Critchley and Peter Clemons laughed while considering the question. Clemons said a lot of "strange philosophies" had come out of Massachusetts. Crtichley said he read Thoreau's journals while staying at one of the dune shacks, one previously occupied by Michael Sperber, a dune dweller who has published on Thoreau. Schuster said, "Of course I've read Thoreau." He pointed to his extensive library in his shack, the walls covered with books. He said he had one of the best natural resource reference libraries on the cape, not as good as Woods Hole, but people came to him for reference sources. He thought Thoreau had interesting observations. But as to whether he was a transcendentalist, Schuster said the question was "hoity toity." So each of these three dune dwellers denied they were transcendentalists. But they understood the question.

As for Henry Beston, Lawrence Schuster said he had purposely chosen not to read Beston's *The Outermost House*. "I want to do it on my own," he said, suggesting he did not want to be unduly influenced by Beston. Connie and David Armstrong talked about Beston in our interview:

Connie: Of course I read it really early. I found it in the bookstore down here the very first year we came, in 1948. So many times you think, 'Oh, I wish I had written that.' Or recently with a painting, 'I wished I had done that particular one.' Someone just had a brilliant composition, just a marvelous idea. I'm jealous. Every once in a while I think, 'What would it be like to really be out here for the whole year?' It just wasn't that way.

David: We used to say, before the Outermost House got swept away, if you mean "outermost" in terms of who was the shortest distance from Spain, I think we're the "outermost house," not Beston.

Beston is treated as a compatriot in these statements, viewed as doing similar things as the dune dwellers. And there is a hint of competition. Schuster and David Armstrong see their own efforts as advancements over Beston's. Peter Clemons showed me a photograph of Grace Bessay sitting in her shack, holding up for the camera Anne Waldren's *Journey to the Outermost House*, which he characterized as a simpler version of Beston's book. This was the text for Grace, according to Clemons, the affinity toward Nature, Man in it, her model. She believed that Beston's book was instrumental in creating the National Seashore, and she considered it ironic that the Seashore would work to evict the dune dwellers who continued living in that tradition.

Neither Gary Isaacson nor Laurie Schecter were willing to put a name to their particular views of the relationship of people and Nature, nurtured by living in the dune district. Nor did they provide names of authors who might express compatible views. Thoreau's name came up, and I asked, "Are your beliefs transcendentalism?" "No" was the response. My impression was that they considered their belief systems to be personally developed. They did not say that their current beliefs had emerged from another source, such as a particular social movement or a religion or a set of influential writers. Isaacson stated that it was good that others should come to the shack to experience for themselves this relationship with Nature, one that is simplified, direct, does not use up resources, uncrowded, creative, and so forth. He said that a bumper sticker summed up this view: "Live Simply, So Others May Simply Live." Later, putting together lunch, Laurie Schecter remarked that she had been called a "tree hugger" and worse in her advocacy work of preserving undeveloped lands in Florida.

Emily Beebe named the environmental writer, John McPhee, as a like-minded compatriot in regards to her experience of the dunes, though she thought Beston's writing fit as well:

Beebe: I think John McPhee would write about this place really, really well. I think he could really nail it down. He spent a lot of time, you know, walking in the footsteps of H. D. Thoreau, and all that. But he's got a real practical sense of things too, like this is the order of things in the real world where, where the wind is blowing all the time, and this is what we're doing in the other world and on the outside.

Wolfe: How about Beston?

Beebe: You know, a little bit, yeah, sure, definitely. I mean, he understood what it was. He understood what he was experiencing and how fortunate he was to be out there. And I think that that's where the spiritual piece of it comes in, because you're so blessed. You know you're so blessed and you're so grateful. And then you realize you're out there, praying like, the whole time in gratitude. That's a really neat way to spend your energy and your thoughts. I think we're encouraged [in America] to be separate and control our environment. But that's just not real. That's not going to save us. That's going to kill us. I think our ability to stay connected to [things like] what direction is the wind coming in, is about really surviving… I use so much water when I live in Wellfleet at my house. But when I'm out at the shack, I use maybe, maybe a gallon, a gallon-and-a-half of water

a day. I'm so aware of it. I'm in touch with every sound. I'm a lot more present in my thinking and more deliberate in my actions. And it's essential that I have that balance. Because otherwise you forget it and you're distant from yourself and you're distant from your neighbor.

Wolfe: Do you have a name for this philosophy?

Beebe: Oh God. No. I think this is real. It's just real.

Wolfe: Do you consider yourself a Greenie?

Beebe: No. Because I don't feel that I'm that rabid. I think I'm more practical than that. This is more – I think this is more on the spiritual and physical plane, where they connect, than in just the physical plane.

Connie Armstrong touched on her views of Nature in response to one of my questions. I had asked whether longer-term dune dwellers had ways of seeing the dunes that other people might not have. Armstrong thought so:

> Oh, I know they do. I know they do. This isn't something you can absorb in a two-week holiday. It's something you don't get with a tour. I've had a tour with a ranger. I've taken many tours through National Parks, in many countries. That's a wonderful, exciting thing to do. But to be here for a while, a year or two or three, to look forward to the seasons changing here! In a similar way, Beston did it, but only for one year. But clearly in his writing, if he could have, he would have gone further to see. These were the changes during one year – what would it be if we were here five years? To see the changes. Remember how we took our walk last June? We saw acre after acre of that rare orchid. I've been out here for years and I might come across one of them and take a photograph of it. It was vast field of them. We just couldn't believe it.
>
> It was just from the very first moment of seeing it, as I said, as a child who wanted to see dunes, who wanted to see something I had read about – here was the Atlantic on one side and Massachusetts Bay on the other, and this eternal struggle between the sands and the pine forests and people pushing sand back. And who's going to win? I still see it happening here, all these years later. Is the sand winning or the pine forest? It was the physical nature of the place. If you do imaging for a peaceful moment, or meditation, I choose this: I lie on the beach with my feet toward high tide, close my eyes, and listen to the tide come in. That's my focusing to get out of the chaotic day. It's always been since I've been here.
>
> I have a philosophy about sand. If you make your home in the dunes, you have to make friends with the sand.
>
> I think it's a sad thing when one generation of people can be so industrious and so capable, that they can ruin lots and lots of land that would otherwise be set aside and natural. Sometimes we think, 'if it's possible, then let's do it.' But I don't think enough human beings say, "well, just because it's possible, maybe we shouldn't do it." If you think of the term, "the true walk gently upon the earth," these people did, Charlie, Grace, Andy, David's brother. They said, "You want to leave behind your memories, not active footprints."

Connie Armstrong touched on sentiments I had heard expressed by other dune dwellers during interviews: the imperative for people to walk lightly in Nature. Living on the dunes for several decades, she placed her views among other historic dune figures she knew – Henry Beston, Charlie Schmid, Grace Bessay, Andrew Fuller, and John Armstrong. Though personally felt and tried, her sentiments were placed within longer traditions of living in Nature, currently expressed by many people who lived in dune shacks.